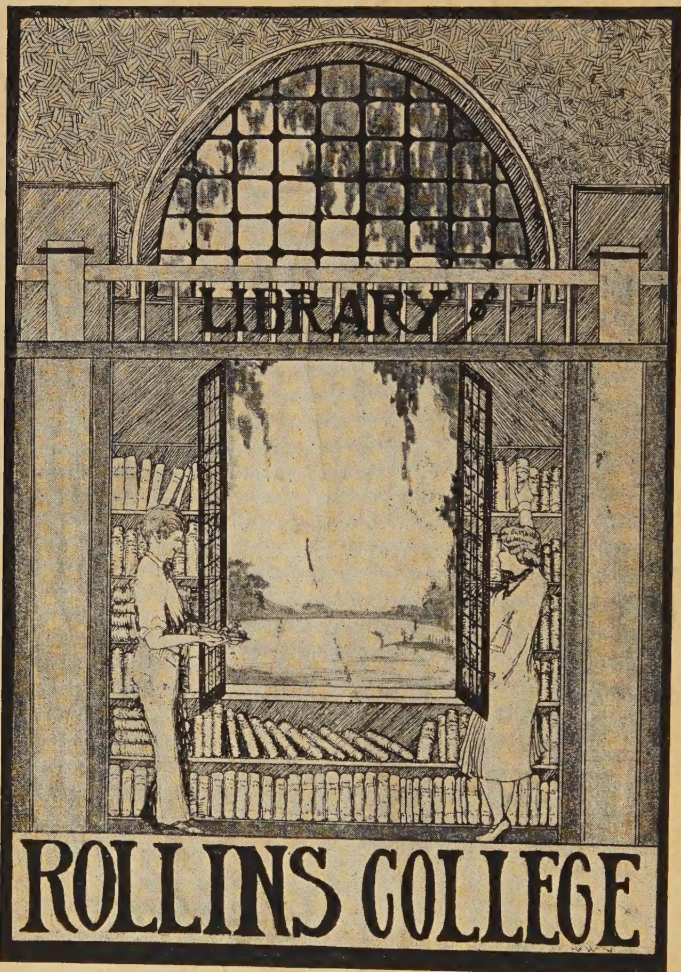




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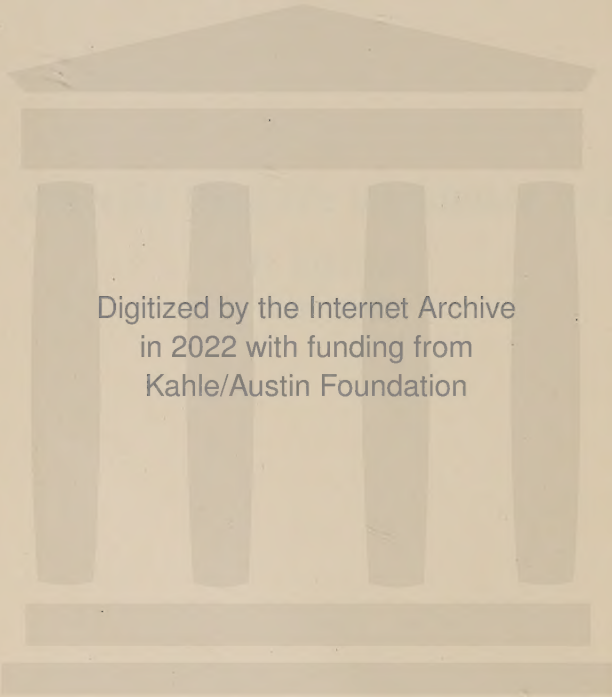
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1922-1924

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VOLUME II
BOOK ONE

SNAKE DOCTOR

By IRVIN S. COBB

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IN THE North they call them Devil's darning needles. But in the South they are snake doctors, and for a reason. These harmless and decorative dragon flies with their slim, arrow-like bodies, their quick darting flight and their filmy wings, as though the arrows had been flecked with bits of drawn lace, are clothed down there with a curious fetish. When a cotton-mouth is sick—and if his feelings match his disposition he must be sick most of the time—the snake doctor comes hurrying to him with the medication for what ails him. Perhaps seventy-five or a hundred years ago some slave newly in from Africa saw a cotton-mouth moccasin sunning its flat, heart-shaped head on top of the yellow creek water, and along the creek came flashing one of these swift creatures seeking a perch upon which to leave its eggs, and the black man saw it suddenly check and hover and stand at poise in the air an inch above the snake's still head, and from that figured this strange bug was a voodoo bug, ministering to the ailing reptile. In such a matter any man's theory is as good as the next one's. The provable thing is that a good many of the whites and more than a good many of the Negroes believe in the fable for a fact; and nearly all of them, regardless of colour, know the libelled insect as snake doctor.

Now, one of the men I have intent to write about here was known as Snake Doctor, too; and for this, also, there were reasons. To begin with, he was very long and thin, a mere rack of bones held together under the casing of a taut yellow skin; and he had popped, staring eyes, and was amazingly fast in his bodily movements. See him slipping through the wil-
lows, so furtive and quick and diffident, with his inadequately small head, his sloped shoulders, his erratic side-steppings this

way or that, and inevitably you were reminded thereby of his namesake. To top the analogy, he lived right among the moccasins, taking no harm from them and having no fear of them, seemingly.

Along Cashier Creek, where they thrive in a wicked abundance, was his regular ranging ground. His cabin stood in the bottoms near a place notorious for its snakes. They were his friends, so to speak. He caught them and with his bare hands he handled them as a butcher might handle links of sausage. He sold them, once in a while, to naturalists or showmen or zoölogical collectors; there was a taxidermist in Memphis who was an occasional customer of his. In the season he rendered down their soft fat and drew it off in bottles and retailed it; snake oil being held a sovereign remedy for rheumatism.

By such traffickings he was locally reputed to have made large sums of money. But he rarely spent any of this money; so he went by the name of miser, also. Well, in a way of speaking, he was a miser; zealously he coveted what he got and kept it hidden away in the chinking of his log shack. But he was nowhere near so well-off as the community gave him credit for being. The snake business is a confined and an uncertain business and restricted, moreover, to its special markets. A dealer's stock in trade may be plentiful, as in this case, but his patrons must be sought. To be exact, Snake Doctor had ninety-seven dollars in his cache.

But swearing to the truth of this on a stack of Bibles a mile high wouldn't have made the people in the Cashier Creek country have it so. Popular opinion insisted on multiplying his means and then adding noughts. Nor could you, by any argument, have won over his neighbours, white or black, to a fair estimate of the man's real self, which was that here merely was a poor, shy, lonely eccentric touched in the head by hot suns and perhaps by spells of recurrent swamp fevers.

They had contempt for him, but mixed in with the contempt was fear. To them he was to be shunned as one having commerce on familiar footing with the most loathly and the most hated of all the creatures that crawl. There was a solitary exception to the current rule of prejudice; a single individual among them who had a human compassion for him and a measure of understanding and right appraisal of him. This

individual, curiously enough, was a woman. She was a minority of one. We'll come to her presently. The rest had forgotten his proper name or else had never heard it. By their majority voice he was Ole Snake Doctor. They knew he was familiar with the ways of the cotton-mouth; they half believed he spoke its language.

In this particular region ordinary folks believed many things that weren't so. Superstition, sprouting out of ignorance, had twisted honest nature into a myriad of perverted and detractive shapes. The innocent little blue-streaked lizard was a "scorpyun" and its sting killed. A porous white stone found in the bellies of rutting deer was the only known cure for a mad dog's bite; clap it on the wound and it clung fast like a leech and sucked the poison out. You never saw many jay-birds in the woods between dinner time and dusk on a Friday because then nearly all the jay-birds had gone below to tell the news of a malicious world to their master, the Devil. You rarely could hit a rain crow with a rifle bullet because this slim, brown, nervous bird enjoyed the special protection of old Nick. If a snapping-turtle closed his jaws down on your flesh he wouldn't let go till it thundered. A breath of warm air blowing across your path on a cool night in the woods meant a "witch-hag" had passed that way.

Or take snakes: the Prophet of Old put the curse on them forever after when in his story of the Garden he typified evil as a serpent; mankind has been enlarging the slander ever since. Moreover, in these parts, Caucasian ingenuity as regards snakes and their ways had overlaid a deep embroidery of ill repute upon an already rich background of African folklore. There was the hoop snake, which is mischievous and very deadly, and wears a deadly horn in its head, and there was the joint snake, which is a freak; both fabulous but both accepted as verities. All well-meaning snakes lay under the scandalous ban. Milk snakes, garter snakes, chicken snakes, puff snakes, blue racers and coachwhips were to be destroyed on sight; for their licking, forked tongues were "stingers" and dripped venom. If bitten by any snake your hope was first to drink all the raw whiskey you could get hold of. Or if within ten minutes after being bitten you clamped upon the wound the still-quivering halves of a young chicken which, while alive, had been split open with a hatchet or a knife,

there yet was a chance for you. Lacking either of these cures or both of them, you must expire in torment. The bitten part would swell enormously; the poison, spreading and magnifying in your blood, would rack you with hideous pains; then swiftly it would reach your heart and you were gone.

Every sort of snake was tricky and guileful but the moccasin of the low grounds the most so of all. Kill a moccasin and spare its mate, and the mate would track you for miles, set on vengeance. It was the habit of the moccasin when meat was scarce to lie beneath the yonkerpads—pond lilies, a Northerner would call them—with its head shoved up among the broad green leaves and its mouth stretched wide and gaping, a living lure for such luckless birds and bees as mistook the snare of the parted jaws with their white linings for a half-opened lily bud.

It was in accord with a quite natural law that the moccasin should be singled out for these special calumnies. Of the four venomous snakes of Temperate North America he is the least personable in looks and behaviour. He lacks the grace of his upland cousin, the copperhead, and he lacks the chivalry of his more distant kinsman, the rattler, which gives the enemy due warning before it strikes. He has none of the slimness of form nor patterned beauty of that streak of fanged lightning which lives in the palmetto scrubs, the coral snake. He is mournfully coloured and miserably shaped. The tones of dull creek mud and of stale creek slime mingle in his scrofulous mottlings. There is leprosy in the pale foxings of his lips, and dropsy in his bloat amidships. Only in the eyes of the taxidermist does he redeem himself for these manifold shortcomings. Being without bright tints to fade in the mounting, his stuffed skin needs no special varnishing to make it seem authentic. It is a poor compliment, perhaps, but his only one. On all other counts and for all other qualities he is copiously defamed and folks generally are prone to believe the worst of him.

Japhet Morner did, for one. For him, swamp water a-thrive with typhoid germs, or rancid corn ponies in which the active seeds of pellagra lived, or mosquitoes carrying malaria and chancre in their bills, conveyed no sense of peril. The mosquitoes were to be endured, the water was to be drunk. And biliousness was the common lot of man, anyway. At least,

in this neck of the woods it was. But snakes, now, were different; any snake and all snakes whatsoever. He accepted for truth all the hard things that might be said of a snake. Certain other things he likewise believed, namely, that first, his nearest neighbour, Snake Doctor, held unwholesome communion with the cotton-mouths; that second, Snake Doctor had a treasure in money hid away in his shack—on this point he was very sure; and that third, the same Snake Doctor was entirely too fond of his, Japhet's, wife, Kizzie Morner, and she of him.

So it would appear he had a triplet of reasons for holding the other in disfavour—envy of him for his stored wealth, a gnawing suspicion from seeing in him a potential philanderer, and finally, that emotion of fearsome distrust bred out of stupidity and credulity which his kind were likely to have for any fellowman fashioned in different likeness from the run of them. That the shambling, soft-brained Snake Doctor was as sexless as a dirt clod would have been apparent to any straight-seeing observer; and it should have been as plainly visible even to this husband of hers that Kizzie Morner was a good woman and an honest one. But the jaundiced eye sees everything as yellow, and yellow is the colour for jealousy, too, and it suited Japhet Morner's mood to brew jealousy in his mind. Brewing it steadily there was strengthening his will for the putting through of a private project which for a long time he had been conning over in his thoughts. The issue came to a head on a certain day.

It was a day in that dreary season of the year when the birds have quit singing in the daytime and the locusts have started. Summer had sagged as though from the sheer exhaustion of its own wasted fervour. The lowland woods had lost that poisonous green sprightliness which came to them in early April and lasted until the August hot spell set in. Even the weeds, which in the bottoms grew rank and high and close-set, almost, as canes in a canebrake, were wilted and weary looking. The sun had come up that morning behind clouds. In the middle of the forenoon the clouds still banked together to hide the heavens, but the heat seemed intensified and pressed the unstirring air close down to the burnt earth. As Japhet Morner came out of the timber into the famished clearing behind his house the sweat dripped from him and

he panted in the close, still humidity. His two dogs trailed him, their tongues lolling. One of them brushed against his leg. He hauled off and fetched the dog a sound kick in the ribs. He was not in a happy humour.

At sun-up, after a breakfast of cold scraps left from the night before, he had gone down to Cashier Creek to get a bait of sunfish. If he were lucky he might catch a catfish for his string. He had no luck, though. The creek was shrunk; it was lower than he ever remembered seeing it. The drought had sucked up its strength. At the shallows it was no more than a thin, sluggish trickle. In deeper places there scarcely was current enough to keep twigs and dropped leaves moving on the unrippled coffee-coloured surface.

Japhet fished and fished and was rewarded with no nibbles whatsoever; seemingly, even the littlest fishes were too languid to bite at the worms he dangled for them in likely spots. He came downstream to the Big Hole, so called, where, an eighth of a mile up from Snake Doctor's shanty, the creek widened to thrice its usual breadth. Here a tight wedge of driftwood blocked the waters. Each successive freshet added flotsam to the rude dam—lost cross-ties, uprooted trees, corn stalks, chips, dead weeds, sticks. Ordinarily this lesser riffle would cover the pool so thickly that, with the top dressing of cream-coloured foam, there was created the simulation of a solid footing; a stranger might have been pardoned for believing he could walk across and keep dryshod. But now all here was clear of gently eddying débris. The consumed stream, instead of slapping against the spanning driftage, ran under it with an oozy, guzzling sound. Directly in the middle there was a busy little whirlpool, funnelling downward.

On one of the lowermost of the bared logs a cotton-mouth was twisted up, taking his ease in the congenial fever warmth. He was a big fat one—fully two feet long and as thick through his girth as a boy's arm. From the bank edge above Japhet saw him and looked about for something to throw at him. In a section where gravel is rare and all rock formations are buried a hundred feet down under the silt, the verb "to stone" is neither used nor known. Your weapon invariably is a "chunk" and with it—a hard clod or a lump of wood or whatever it is—you "chunk" away at your target. The man found a sizable missile, a heavy, half-rotted sycamore bough,

and he snapped it off to suitable length and flung it, twirling, at the motionless mark. His aim was good. The stricken snake flapped out of coil and dragged its broken loops from sight into an interlacing of naked limbs on the farther side of its log. The stick bounced hard and splashed in the pool. Japhet saw how then it swirled around and around and then, briskly, was sucked beneath the jam. With a quickened curiosity he moved downstream a rod or two and waited. Although the jam was now, so to speak, a suspension bridge, and in places stood inches clear of the water, the stick did not emerge into view below it. No drift showed there, either; the creek for a space flowed clear of rubbish. Evidently, objects caught in that small whirlpool above were carried in and under to lodge and be held fast by some submerged trap-work of soaked and sunken limbs. Probably they would stay there for months, perhaps stay there always. Turning the matter of the phenomenon over in his mind, he flung away his bait can, spun his fishing cane so that the line wrapped around it, and made off through the woods for his home, nearly a mile away. The two dogs raked along at his heels. Coming out of the woods one of them made the mistake of nudging him.

Having disciplined the scrooging dog with his boot toe he slouched out into the six-acre "dead'nin'." His puny patch of corn, for lack of the hoe, was smothering in weeds. In bare spots where the thin soil was washed so close down to the underlying clay-pan that here not even weeds would sprout, the crawfish had pushed up their conical watch towers of dried mud. Tall ash boles, girdled and dead, threw fore-shortened shadows across the clearing—shadows such as gallows trees might cast. His house, of two rooms and built of unpainted up-and-down planking, squatted in the inadequate shade of a stunted chinaberry tree. A well was at one corner. There was no flower bed, no truck patch, no fencing. Across the open space, with the heat waves dancing before him, the outlines of the house seemed to waver and twist like an object seen through smoke. It stood a foot from the earth on log props. Because of seepage there were no cellars in this neighbourhood. The inevitable dogs lived under the houses and bred their fleas there, and the hogs, too, if so be a house owner had any hogs.

It was nearly noon now. His wife, in a skimpy blue frock open at the throat, was cooking the midday meal, the principal meal of the three. He came up to the door and she, looking up from the cook stove where she was turning the strips of sizzling fat meat in the skillet, saw the look on his face. Her mouth twitched apprehensively. By the signs she knew when he was in one of his tantrums.

"Ketch anything, Jafe?" she asked, nervously.

"Ketch anything this weather?—whut'd you expect I'd ketch?" From his voice it might be figured that, vicariously, he blamed her for the failure of his expedition.

He hunkered down on the doorstep, his fishing pole still in his hands.

"That pore old Mist' Rives come by here a spell ago mighty nigh shook to pieces with a chill," she said, after a bit.

"Oh, he come by, did he?" His tone, purposely, was disarming. "Well, did he come in?"

"Jes' fur a minute."

"Jes' fur a minute, heh? And whut did he want?"

"He wanted could I give him somethin' fur his ailmint. He jes' about could drag one sorry foot before the other—barely could make it up here from his place. I reckon he must be down in bed with the fever by now; I could tell by the touch it wuz risin' in him when he left here and started back home ag'in. It'll be mighty pitiful, him down flat of his back and nobody there to do nothin' fur his comfort. I give him a dos't out of our Butler's Ager Drops. I would 'a' give him a little smidgin' of licker only—only——" She left the sentence unfinished. "That pore shackly Mist' Rives, he — Oh, please don't, Jafe!"

Turning, he had cut viciously at her with the long cane. She shrank back as it whipped through the air, and took the lashing stroke on her forearm, thrown up to fend off the blow.

"Mist' Rives! Mist' Rives!" He mimicked her, furiously. "How many times I got to tell you that there old hoodoo's name is Snake Doctor? Him that'd skin a louse fur its hide and taller and you callin' him 'Mist' Rives'! You'll be callin' him 'Honey' and 'Sugar' next without I learn you better. Pet names, huh? Well, I aim to learn you."

She flinched at the threat, rubbing the welt on her skin; but

he made no effort to strike her again. He sat glowering, saying nothing at all as she made hurry to dish up the food and put it before him; she hoped the weight of victuals in his stomach might dull the edge of his temper. For her part, she had the wisdom to keep silent, too. She ate on her feet, serving him between bites and sups, as was the rule in this household.

After dinner he stretched himself on the floor of the inner room. But he did not sleep. He was busy with his thoughts. One thing he had seen that day, and another thing he had heard—he was adding them together, as the first sum in a squalid equation. She drew a cane-bottom chair outdoors and sat under the chinaberry tree, fanning herself and “dipping” snuff with a peach twig which she scoured back and forth on her gums. After a little while she was driven into the kitchen. It began to rain in sharp, violent showers. The rain made the house inside no cooler; merely changed it from a bake-oven to a putrid steambox.

It was getting along toward four o'clock before Japhet emerged from the front room. He drew on his heavy knee-length boots, which he had removed before lying down, and laced them up. This done, he spoke to her for the first time since noon.

“Where’s that there vi’l of licker?” he said. “Fetch it here to me.”

They kept a small store of whiskey by them—all in that district did the same—for chills and possible snake bites. She brought him a pint flask nearly full and he shoved it into his hip pocket. Then immediately, as though moved by a fresh idea, he hauled it out again and put it down on the kitchen table.

“Come to think about it,” he said, “I won’t be needin’ to tote no sperrits along with me where I’m goin’. Cottonmouths is all down in the slashes or else along the creek, and where I’ll be all this evenin’ is up on Bailey’s Ridge in the high ground.”

He was not given to favouring her with explanations of his motives or accounts of his movements. This departure from fixed habit emboldened his wife to put a question.

“Fixin’ to go shootin’, Jafe?” she asked, timidly.

“I aim to gun me a chance of young squirrels ’twixt now

and dusk time. I heard 'em barkin' all 'round me this mornin'. Ef they're that plenty in the low ground they'll be out thicker'n hops after the mulberries and the young hick'ry nuts up Bailey's Ridge."

He took up his single-shot rifle where it stood in a corner, and from an opened box on a shelf scooped a handful of brass shells. Then he went outside and tied up both his dogs. One was a hound, good for hunting rabbits. It was proper that he should be left behind. But the smaller dog, a black mongrel, was a trained squirrel dog. As his wife stood in the doorway, Japhet read the dumb curiosity which her face expressed.

"With the leaves ez thick ez the way they air, still huntin' is best this time o' year," he explained. "So I won't be needin' Gyp. Don't let neither one of 'em gnaw hisself loose and follow after me. Set me up a snack of cold supper on a shelf. Likely I won't git back till its plum' nighttime—gunnin' fur them squirrels is best jes' before dark, and I'll be away off yonder at the fur end of the Ridge, three miles from here, when I git ready to start back. 'Tain't ez ef I wuz rangin' in the low ground."

He turned north through the struggling corn rows and in a minute was gone from her sight into the dripping woods. He kept on going north for nearly a mile until he came to where a wild red mulberry tree stood in a small natural opening. Some of the overripe fruit, blackened and shrivelled, still clung to the boughs; and where there are mulberries in the summer woods, there squirrels almost certainly will likewise be. Very neatly he shot two young grays through their heads. Japhet was a master marksman. It was his only gentlemanly accomplishment. In all other respects he was just plain white trash, as one of his negro neighbours would have phrased it—behind Japhet's back. But unsuspected by any who knew him, he had a quality of mind which is denied many of his class—an imagination. It was in excellent working order this day. He now was proving that it was.

He tied the brained squirrels together and swung them, tails downward, over a strap of his suspenders. If needed, they were to be evidence in his behalf—part of his alibi. Next he sat down under a tree awhile. He sat out two brisk showers with the intervals between them. Then, getting up, he set off,

keeping always to the deeper woodlands, in a swing which would bring him down Bailey's Branch, now wasted to a succession of lazy dribbles, and along the skirts of Little Cypress Slash to the sunken flats edging Cashier Creek. The arc of his swing was wide. It took him all of two hours, travelling carefully and without haste through the steamy coverts, to reach the point he aimed for.

He came to halt, cautiously and well sheltered, behind the farthest fringes of a little jungle of haw bushes where the diminishing woods frayed out in a sort of green peninsula fifty yards or so back of Snake Doctor's cabin. This was his chosen destination, so here he squatted himself down in a nest of sodden leaves and grass to wait. It had begun to shower again, good and hard. He was drenched. No matter, though; he figured he would not have so very long to wait. As it turned out he didn't.

There was no house dog to come nosing him out and barking an alarm. That Snake Doctor owned no dog would have marked him, in this part of the land, as a person totally different from his fellows, even had there been lacking other points of variance. What Snake Doctor did own was a mare, or the ruins of one. She was housed in a log crib a few rods behind the only slightly larger log cabin of her owner. Where he stooped, Japhet could hear her stirring restlessly in her stall. He might have seen her through the cracks between the logs of her shelter except for a brush fence which bounded the small weed-grown clearing.

His plan was simple enough and yet, as he saw it, fault-proof. Feeding time was at hand; soon Snake Doctor, ailing though he was, surely would be coming out from his cabin to bait the old rack-of-bones. Japhet counted on this. He'd get him then, first pop. He'd teach him what the costs were of colleaguings with another man's lawful wedded wife, and the lesson would be the death of him. At a half crouch in his ambush, Japhet told himself that his motive was jealousy; that he was here as a white man and an injured husband for the satisfaction of his personal honour and in the defense of his threatened threshold. By a conscious effort of his will he kept in the background of his mind the other purpose that had brought him on this errand. It had to do with money—with Snake Doctor's hoarded money.

The next step after the principal act would be to dispose of the body. That should be easy. He could carry the meagre frame over his shoulder for a mile, if need be. And he wouldn't have to carry it for a mile, either—only as far as the Big Hole; then lower the burden into the water and let it slip in under the log jam. The chunk he had killed the moccasin with had stayed under there, skinny old Snake Doctor would stay there, too. This done, he would come back here to the cabin and hunt out the hidden treasure. He figured it shouldn't take him a great while to find it; he already had a sort of notion as to its whereabouts, a strong clew to start on. Having found it he would circle back up through the woods, reëntering his field from the upper or northern side, with two squirrels flapping his flank for proof that he had been hunting on Bailey's Ridge. Suspicion never could touch him. Why should it?

He counted on the rain which was now falling to wipe out his tracks in Snake Doctor's horse lot. Anyhow, it probably would be days or weeks before any one missed the hermit and made search for him; in that time the tracks would have vanished, rain or no. It was greatly in his favour that when Snake Doctor was from home, or supposed to be, folks religiously refrained from setting foot on the premises. They mightily feared the cotton-mouths with which the recluse was reputed to consort. There was even a story that Snake Doctor kept for a watchman in his house the granddaddy of all created cotton-mouths and set this monster on guard when he stirred abroad. So he needed no locks on his doors nor bar for his single window, the legend amply protecting his belongings in his absences.

Ten minutes passed, fifteen, and Japhet was up on his knees, his rifle at poise, his eyes vigilant through the tops of the weeds which fringed the ambuscade. Something or other—something quick and furtive—stirred behind him. Startled, he turned his head, saw that the disturber was a belated catbird, and looked front again. In that brief space of time the victim had come into sight. Through the rain and the slackening daylight he could see, above the ragged top of the intervening brush fence, the white patch of Snake Doctor's lippy old straw hat and below the hat the folds of a dark coat drawn over a pair of hunched narrow shoulders as the wearer

of these garments came briskly toward the stable, which meant also toward him. At this distance he couldn't miss.

Nor did he. At the shot, the figure jerked backward, then went over face forward. The killer rose upright, exultation contending with tautened nerves within him. He stole up to the fence, set a foot in the tangled brushwood with intent to climb it, and then, at what he saw, froze into a poised shape of terror, his eyes bulging, his mouth opened in a square shape, and his rifle dropping from his twitching fingers.

He had just killed Snake Doctor—killed him dead with a 32-calibre slug through the head. And here on his doorsill stood Snake Doctor, whole and sound, and staring at him! And now, Snake Doctor, dead by all rights and rules, yet living, was uttering a cry and starting out of the doorway toward him.

Japhet Morner had sucked in superstitions with his mother's milk. He believed in "ha'nts," in "witch-hags" and "sperrits," believed in "conjures" and "charms" and ghosts and hoopsnakes; believed that those under the favour of infernal forces might be killed only with a bullet molded from virgin silver. And his mistake was, he had used lead out of a brass shell.

Power of motion returned to him. He threw himself backward and whirled and ran into the deep of the darkening woods, making whimpering, whining sounds like a thrashed puppy as he went.

Terror rode him into the dense timber. Exhaustion, dizziness, the feeling that he must get under the shelter of a sound roof, must have the protection of four walls about him, brought Japhet Morner out again; this was along toward midnight. The rain had ceased; the moon was trying to come forth. A short distance southeast of his place he struck a dirt road which would lead him there. Beyond the next bend he would be in sight of home.

Around the turn he saw coming toward him a joggling light—a lantern hung on a buggy or light wagon, he figured—and heard the creak of wheels turning in the muddied softness. Nameless horrors had made a fugitive of him; the fugitive instinct still possessed him. He flattened down in a clump of bushes to hide until the traveller passed.

Moving briskly, the rig was almost opposite him when,

from the other direction—the same direction he had been following—came a call:

“Hello there!—who’s joggin’?”

“Whoa! Stiddy, boy!” Whoever was driving pulled up his horse, which had shied at the sudden hail. “Me—Davis Ware,” he answered back. “That you, Tip Bailey?”

“Yep, hoofin’ it out from the Junction, and tolerable tired, if anybody should ask you. What’s bringin’ you out this hour of night, Davis—somebody sick?”

“Sick nothin’! There’s been hell poppin’ in these bottoms to-night.”

Behind the weed screen ten feet away the listener stiffened, his blood drumming in him. He knew the speakers, both neighbours of his, one of them a local leader. The foot passenger hurried up alongside the buggy; his face, inquisitive and alarmed, showed in the dim circlet of lantern light.

“What do you mean?”

“A killin’—that’s what I mean. An abominable, cold-blooded killin’ ef ever there wuz one.”

“God! Who’s been killed?”

“I’m fixin’ to tell you, man. It happened jes’ shortly before dusk at ole Snake Doctor’s place.”

“Was it him was killed?”

“Gimme time, can’t you?” This Ware was one who must tell his tale his own way or not at all. “It seems like Snake Doctor’s been chillin’ lately. He wuz purty bad off to-day—I mean yistiddy. And so, right after supper time when the rain wuz lullin’ a little, Mizz Kizzie Morner she footed it down from her place to his’n, fetchin’ some physic with her and a plate of hot vittles fur him. It seems like she wuzn’t feared to go there. I’d ’a’ been, I’ll own up, but she wuzn’t. Well, purty soon after she got there it seems like he tried to git up out of his bed to go feed that old crow-bait sorrel nag of his’n. It had started in ag’in by then, pourin’ down hard, and so she made him stay where he wuz. And she put on his old hat and throwed his old coat round her to keep off the wust of the wet, and she started out of the back door to do the feedin’. And no more’n she’d got outside in the lot than a shot come from the aide of the woods right over the fence and down she went with a bullet through her brains.”

“God’s sake! Dead?”

"No, not dead, but same ez dead. She barely wuz breathin' here not ten minutes ago when I left her house. Old Doctor Bradshaw, he's there with her now and he says it's a miracle she's lasted this long. Well, it seems like Snake Doctor jumped up at the shot and run out to see whut had happened and there she lay a-welterin'. And him—well, he's been takin' on like all possessed ever since. I wouldn't 'a' believed he could 'a' had so much feelin' in him ef I hadn't seen him with my own eyes. It wuz him run for help, though—he did have sense enough left to do that. He found me in my tobacco patch and I dropped everything and took out fur there, and a bunch of us picked her up and toted her home on a wagon bed. She's shot in the left side of the head just over the temple; the bullet went clean through and come out on the right side."

"But who did it?"

"I'm comin' to that. 'Twuz that low-flung husband of hers done it—that's who. It seems like he must 'a' followed her down to Snake Doctor's and laid in wait fur her and felled her ez she come out. Gawd knows why onless 'twuz jes' pure pizen meanness."

"The murderin' dog! They're certain 'twas him, then?"

"Shore ez gun's iron 'twuz him. Snake Doctor ketched a quick look at him over the fence ez he darted off. And right there they found his rifle where he'd dropped it before he whirl't and run—fool thing fur him to do—and I seen his tracks myself, in the soft ground, goin' and comin', and where he must 'a' stood when he fired. I seen 'em by lantern light after I got there—and fully half a dozen others did, too. There's a long red streak on her arm where he must 'a' been whuppin' her durin' the day."

"Hangin's a sight too good! Did they catch him?"

"No, but they will. Some thinks he's made fur the slashes and hid out there—his tracks led off that way. There'll be a line of men throwed all the way round Little Cypress before sun-up. They're organizin' the posse at the Morner place."

"Sheriff got there yet?"

"No, but he's due by daylight or sooner. They telephoned in from Gallup's Mills to him and he's already started fur here with his pack of dogs. The trail ought to lay good, ground bein' damp the way it is. Ole Snake Doctor he's

carryin' on and ravin' round, sayin' the Lord's goin' to strike the murderer down in his tracks. But I'm puttin' my main dependence on them bloodhounds—on them first, and then mebbe on a good stout plough line and the limb of a tree. Oh, they'll ketch him, and when they do I 'low to be there! I'm jes' puttin' out fur my place to roust out my oldest boy and fetch him back with me. There's a good size crowd already."

"Don't let me hold you up any longer, then," said the pedestrian, a deadly grimness in his tone. "I'm ready now—got a pistol here in my hip pocket. That poor thing! She always was a good-hearted, hard-workin' woman and mightily put upon. As for Jafe Morner—well, if I should be so lucky as to be the one to jump him out of the sticks, I'm goin' to shoot first and ask questions afterwards. I'll be waitin' there at Morner's, Davis."

He broke into a half run.

In the patchy moonlight which sifted through the shredding rain clouds Snake Doctor's house made a black square against the lesser blackness of its background. To it, panting in his haste, came the assassin, running. He feared the place—to the bottom of his desperate soul he feared it—but a fear yet greater was driving him hither. Previously it has been stated that this man had a powerful imagination. To a literate person it might have been a gift. To him, in this emergency, it was a curse. It set his sore and smitten nerves on end; still, it honed his wits to a sharper edge.

What he overheard back there on the dirt road had remodelled his formless flight into a shaped intent. Now he had to deal, not with phantoms and haunting apparitions, but with tangible dangers; dangers not less frightful than those others perhaps, but to be coped with and—if his luck held—outwitted by physical devices. There was no remorse in him. After all, he fairly well was suited by the outcome of his mistake; getting safely away was what concerned him. In his present plight, weaponless, without a cent in his pocket, with the countryside rousing to hunt him, escape was out of prospect. But with money to buy his way along he'd have a good chance. Let the sheriff come on with his dogs, then, let the mob form, with their talk of a rope and cold lead. With any sort of break he'd best them. He would strike through the deep timber for the river; in six hours of steady

travelling he could make it. At the river he would hire a shanty-boater to ferry him across to the Arkansas side; in some town over there buy clothes and get his hair cut; then catch a train and travel as far west or as far south as the steam-cars would take him. And it was Snake Doctor's cash that would buy the way for him! He had little time, though.

Mighty little. He knew the interior arrangements of Snake Doctor's one room—the pallet in this corner, the fireplace in that, the chair and table drawn out on the sagging floor. In the one spying visit he ever had paid Snake Doctor two weeks before, when this shooting scheme first formed in his mind, he had noted these things in detail. He had marked also the very spot where he felt certain the place of concealment for the money was. All through his stay Snake Doctor, tremulous and plainly apprehensive, had manœuvred to keep between the unbidden, unwelcome caller and the corner where his comforters and blankets were placed. Also, the recluse's eyes had helped to betray him; time and time again they had turned nervously to the wall just beyond and above the bedding, a point, say, five or six feet above it. Just about there, probably in a concealed gap between or behind the logs, the loot surely must be.

He thrust through the planked door, sagging on its leather hinges, and crossed directly to the fireplace. There was no fire in it, but, stooping and fumbling with his hands he found chips there ready to be kindled, and under the chips scraps of paper—good! He needed a light of sorts to search by. He had matches in his pocket, corked in a bottle, water-tight. He got them out as quickly as his shaking fingers would let him. There were only four of them. One after another he struck them. But the paper was damp from rain coming down the mud chimney, and no fire caught until the fourth and last match had been struck. Then it merely flickered; it ran slowly along the edge of the charring paper, threatening to go out.

All right, then, let it go out if it wanted to. He could see in the dark as well as the next one, and had hands to feel with. He made for the corner diagonally across the cabin and ran his hands swiftly along the exposed upper surface of a certain log, probing for any deep depressions in the rotted bark adhering to it, nicking the dried clay mortar with his nails.

He tried that log without result, started on the log above it—and sucked in his breath as loose scraps of bark fell away at his touch from where they covered a niche in the joining. The cavity thus exposed was roughly circular in shape, the diameter, about, of a man's arm; he could tell that by fingering its edges. This must be the hole. Greedily he thrust his right hand in. It touched something—something slick and firm and smooth—and there came a quick darting sting as pointed things, sharp and keen, jabbed his thumb, tearing the skin as he jerked his hand out.

In that same breath the feeble flame in the fireplace caught well and flared up, its blaze filling the cabin with a wavery, unreliable radiance. Japhet Morner, flinging his hand up before his face, saw by that red brightness that on the inner side of his thumb were two tiny torn punctures, half an inch apart, from which drops of blood had started; and then, on beyond, two feet away, at the level of his stricken eyes he saw the forepart of a thick snake, its hideous dull-marked head lifted and thrust back just within the round of the orifice, its mouth wide open, with the cottony linings revealed, its neck taut and curved as though ready to strike again.

He gave a strangled, slobbering howl and leaped to the other side of the room, sobbing, grasping, uttering fragments of formless sound. The blood pumped and spurted from his flirled thumb to prove the wounds though minute were deep.

He must have whiskey to drink or the cloven, hot carcass of a freshly killed chicken to bind fast to the bite, or he was done for. At his house half a mile away was whiskey and there chickens were asleep on their roost. He might make it. He whirled about, then recoiled as though a hard blow had stopped him. He couldn't go where men were assembling, ready and anxious to stretch his neck for him.

Now then, his brain told him that, already and thus soon, quick pangs were leaping down his thumb, through his hand, flaming along his wrist and up his arm. The poison must be racing in his veins, mounting and growing, as he had heard it would. He had a feeling that his hand was swelling, making the skin tighter and tighter. There was no help, and even did help come now it would come too late. He howled and dropped and rolled on the floor.

Up in the creviced wall the forward length of the snake

showed, its head still guardingly reared on its slim neck, its lidless pale eyes, like twin bits of blurred glazing, aglow in the shifting firelight.

He got upon his feet, and a terrific pain struck at his heart, squeezing and wringing it. His throat closed and he choked. A second pain twisted his heart.

With a drunken leap he cleared the sill of the rear doorway, ran in a wavering course a few strides out across the horse lot and then, as his knees gave way under him, he pitched forward on his face, his lolled mouth full of weeds and muddy grass stems. The cramping fingers of his outstretched right hand almost touched a reddish black smear where the earth was trampled and the grass flattened down.

"Good reddance, by gravy! I'd call it that; wouldn't you, doc?"

The speaker was driving Doctor Bradshaw back to his home near Gallup's Mills. The other raised his head wearily. He had been up all night and he was an old man.

"Well," he said, "I'd not have wished the death he died on any man, no matter what he'd done to deserve it. Yet I reckon there was a sort of rough justice in it, too. Anyway, we've been saved a lynching or else a regular hanging. And one would have been a scandal on the county and the other an expense to the taxpayers. Maybe you have got the right idea about it, Jim Meloan.

"I'm looking at it more from the professional point of view. I've had two strange experiences this past night, Jim. I've seen an under-nourished, sickly woman, after being shot through the brain, linger for nearly seven hours before dying, and I've examined the body of a man who'd been killed by a snake bite—killed good and quick, too, judging by the evidences."

"Well, doc, ain't that the way a cotton-mouth always does kill a man—sudden like? I've always heard tell——"

"Never mind what you've heard," said the old doctor; he was cross because he was sleepy. "I'm going by the facts, not by fairy tales. I was born and raised down here, and I've been practising medicine in this county for going on forty-six years. And I tell you that in all my life I've never known of but two or three people actually being bitten by water

moccasins, and until this morning early I never had personal knowledge of anybody at all dying from the bite of any kind of snake. Horses?—well, yes. Dogs?—maybe so. But not a human being.

“Still, the proof is clear enough in this case. I think I’ll write a paper about it for the next meeting of the State Medical Society. The places were the fangs nipped him were right there in the ball of his thumb—two bloody deep little scratches, side by side. And then there was that look on his face—*ugh!* I’m fairly hardened, but I’m not going to forget Jafe Morner’s face in a hurry. He died quick, I’d say offhand, but he died hard, too; I’ll swear to that part of it. Well, he was the kind who likely would flicker out pretty brisk under certain circumstances. Ever notice the colour of his skin and those heavy pouches under his eyes? Bad whiskey and bad food and swamp fevers didn’t put those signs on him. The late Japhet had a rotten bad heart, Jimmy.”

“He shorely did,” agreed Meloan, fervently. “Yistiddy proved that.”

“I don’t mean exactly in that sense,” explained the physician. “I mean there was an organic weakness. Curious thing, though, there was no swelling round the wounds nor any swelling in his hand or arm; no noticeable blotching of the skin, either. And yet, if there’s anything in the accepted theories of the toxic effects of a venomous snake’s bite, those conditions should have been marked. Oh, I’ll have quite a paper to read before the Society!”

“Mebbe the swellin’ had done went down before you got to him,” suggested the morbidly interested farmer.

“No, he couldn’t have been dead more than a short while when they went down there to set the dogs on the trail and found him; Sheriff Gill tells me he was still warm. And I was there not ten minutes after that. It’s a mighty unusual case—several features about it that puzzle me. F’rinstance now, what about the snake that gashed him? Which-a-way did it come from beforehand and where did it head for afterwards? I didn’t see any snake tracks in the ground close to where he was laying—I looked for ’em, too. Still, the horse lot was pretty well trompled. Now, that poor forlorn old creature that you people in this neighborhood call Snake Doctor, he’s got his own pet theory about it. He keeps on

saying it was the vengeance of the Lord falling upon a red-handed murderer. He thinks the fellow was drawn back to the seat of his crime—well, that might be so; I've heard of such things before—and that the Divine Wrath lit on him. But if I was him I'd be poking under the stable or the cabin for a whopping big snake.

"He tells me, though—and he ought to be an authority on the subject if anybody is—he tells me that a water moccasin never travels many yards away from the water and that nighttimes they always den up somewhere, being cold-blooded creatures that love the sunshine. And on top of that he swears to me that there never have been any moccasins close about his diggin's unless he'd brought 'em there dead or else as prisoners in a sack."

"Why, looky here, doc," broke in Meloan, "he lied to you, then. There's always been a sayin' round here that Snake Doctor kept a huge big cotton-mouth right with him in his house all the time!"

"Yes, that's true. I saw it myself, not an hour ago," said the doctor, smiling a little. "I reckon the old fellow's smarter than folks give him credit for being. He took me in his shack and showed it to me."

"But I thought you jes' now said——"

"Wait till I finish. He took me in and showed it to me, just as I'm telling you. But it was deader than Hector. It was a stuffed snake—with glass eyes and all. It seems a professional taxidermist who was up here from Memphis some years ago mounted it for our eccentric friend. Well, I'll tell the world he made a good job of it. Lifelike?—you bet you! See it in a poor light and you'd almost be ready to swear you saw it move its head. I wouldn't have the thing round me for any amount of money. But it seems this old fellow had a purpose in keeping it.

"That point came out in a sort of a peculiar way, too. It's been common gossip, I understand, that Snake Doctor had a store of money laid by. No doubt you've heard exaggerated stories about the size of his wad; but I'm prepared to tell you it wasn't much—just under a hundred dollars, all told. After he'd calmed down he told me he didn't crave to keep it any more. He said he wanted it spent, paying for a proper funeral for that poor woman—said she was the only friend

he'd had in the world; the only one that ever gave him a kind look or a kind word. So he asked me and Tip Bailey to take charge of it and then he took me in his shanty and got it out from the secret place where he'd kept it hid. It was tucked down in behind a break in the chinking between two of the side logs. And—listen to this, Jim—right in front of it, just back inside the mouth of the opening, he'd set that stuffed cotton-mouth of his, figuring that the bare sight of it, with its neck all bent like as if it was fixing to lunge, and its jaws wide open, would kind of discourage anybody who might take a notion to start exploring in there.

“And then, for a further precaution—oh, he's plenty smart in his way!—he'd gone and lined the inside of the hole all round the edges and halfway down to the bottom with coils of barbed wire, with the points sticking up every which-a-way. Anybody who rammed his hand in there suddenly would certainly get gaffed. Not that anybody would who'd seen the snake first.”

The old doctor yawned heavily. “Purty cute little notion, I'd call it.”

INNOCENCE

By ROSE WILDER LANE

From Harper's

WHEN Mary Alice came quite awake her mother was rubbing her face with a cold, wet cloth. They were in the little room at the end of the car; the floor was shaking like the skin of a horse that tries to get rid of a fly, and underneath the floor the wheels were talking. Clickety-clack! they said, Clickety-clack!

"Wake up, baby," Mother said. "We'll be there in a few minutes." She turned Mary Alice around and began buttoning up. A little light ran along the edge of the shining washbasin; when Mary Alice turned her head the little light ran away very quickly, when she turned her head the other way it stopped suddenly and ran back.

"Stand still, dear!" Mother said. The best, beautiful pink dress came jerkily down over Mary Alice's head and was buttoned. Then Mother turned her around again and pushed into place the thin, curved red comb that held her hair tight. Mother's eyes were clear, like water, and full of happiness. Her two hands gave Mary Alice's face an excited little squeeze.

"We're going to see Father and Uncle Charley again. Aren't you glad?" she said.

"Will there be pickaninnies?" Mary Alice asked, anxiously. Pickaninnies were children as black as coal; Mother had promised that she would see them in Florida. Mother said yes, there would be pickaninnies.

Mary Alice sat on the chair while Mother dressed. When she sat on the edge of the chair her legs disappeared; when she pulled herself back two feet popped up in front of her. That was because her legs bent; her legs had hinges in them,

like doors. Mother's hair was very long, and no one could see at once all the lights that scampered through it. Mother's hands were going so fast that they were out of breath, and fluttered. When they came to a snarl they jerked at it, but Mother never cried. Her face in the glass smiled at Mary Alice.

"You remember Uncle Charley, don't you?" she said.

Mary Alice remembered Uncle Charley. When they lived at Grandfather's he used to put her high on the big backs of the horses at the watering trough. She remembered his legs, going into the pile of hay in the car that had taken Father and him down south to Florida. First his arms and head went in, and then one leg and then the other, and that was the last of Uncle Charley. Then there was nothing but hay. She must not tell any one that Uncle Charley was in the hay, because they were poor, and if people knew that Uncle Charley was going to Florida with Father and the horses and the cow they would not let him go. For a long time Mary Alice had not spoken of Uncle Charley, but she remembered him. He was big and strong and always laughing.

When the train stopped they got down the high car steps and were alone in a gray light. Mother looked anxiously this way and that, and her hand hurt Mary Alice's. Then she dropped it, and Father was there. "Hello! Here you are!" he said. He and Mother looked at each other, and it was as though they were together in a warm little space. Mary Alice was outside, chilly and uncomfortable. She tugged at Mother's sleeve and said, "Where are the pickaninnies?" Then they laughed and took her into the warmth.

"Didn't Charley come?" said Mother, and Father swung Mary Alice into the air and kissed her. His face was suddenly close and big, a brown, prickly face with deep creases in the cheeks.

The horses and wagon waited by the platform. Mary Alice was swung high over the wheel into the seat, Father and Mother climbed up beside her, and Father clucked to the horses. The horses walked quickly, jerking their heads, and little plops of white dust rose from their feet. They passed a store and some low, unpainted houses with wide porches. Strange trees grew in the yards. Their branches grew as though they meant something strange and frightening; their

leaves were like flat green hands with wide fingers, and their fruit was black. In one of these trees was a black boy. He sat on a branch and dangled black legs and with one hand he picked a black fruit. His large mouth was very full of white teeth, and he bit the black fruit with them; he bit it through, and laughed. Mary Alice could not look away from him; her head turned slowly and her eyes stayed fixed on him for a long time.

"Here we are, in the piney woods!" said Father. The white road went curving between straight, tall gray trees that had no branches. Far overhead their green-black tops whispered breathlessly, without stopping, telling something terrifying. The gray trunks stood still in a gray light; they knew, but they were silent, and the pale ground looked up at them. A smell of dampness and of wet paint-brushes was in the air.

Father's cheerful voice sounded loud and false. Mother's voice was low and unrelenting, as though she were talking about telling lies. Uncle Charley was her little brother.

"You must tell me what it is," she said.

Mary Alice watched the horses' ears. They turned this way and that, and reminded Mary Alice of birds sitting on a fence.

Suddenly Mother cried out, as though someone had struck her. Mary Alice looked up quickly. Mother's face was broken. Mother was crying, and nothing was safe. Terror and strangeness reached out of the gray woods and seized Mary Alice, and she shrieked, and there was nothing anywhere but sobbing and screams. Father was talking to her, but she could not hear him; and he was holding her, but she could not feel that he was near. Then he was putting something into her hand and telling her to taste it. It was sweet and salty. Sugar cane, he said; she was to suck it. It was smooth and green and round, like a large stick of candy. The wagon was still jolting on, and she sat tasting the sugar cane through her sobs until she fell asleep. She fell asleep feeling a blackness of something that had got Uncle Charley and made Mother cry.

But when she woke there he was. His big hands were holding her in the air, and he was laughing up at her. His face was red-brown and his eyes were very blue, and beneath

the edge of his blue shirt was the strip of pinky-white skin; he had just come in from the fields and was putting her up on the big horse. No, there was the wagon and a strange, zig-zag fence and many large, fresh chips scattered around a new house in the piney woods. She was in Florida, and Uncle Charley was here, too, and safe.

"Oh!" she cried, hugging his neck tight. "Mother cried about you, and I was afraid!"

The last sob came unexpectedly out of her throat, and then she felt a queer stillness. She slid to the ground. There was a strange woman, a black-haired, black-eyed, red-cheeked woman in a beautiful, bright-red dress. She was fascinating, like Grandfather's big brown horse that lived behind bars and had once killed a man.

"This is your new Aunt Molly, Mary Alice," said Mother. Mother's face was smiling, but Mother was not smiling. Mary Alice took tight hold of Mother's brown skirt and held out a hand.

"How do you do, Aunt Molly?" she said, carefully.

"The other hand, dear," said Mother.

Mary Alice saw Aunt Molly's bare feet, bare and brown and dusty with white dust. She looked up the beautiful red skirt to Aunt Molly's hands that were on Aunt Molly's hips, and on up to the bright-coloured face. The face tipped back, a thick white throat came up out of the red collar, and suddenly Aunt Molly laughed a short, queer laugh.

"Well, nyow," she said, "I'm right proud to meet you," and she shook Mary Alice's hand as though she were making fun. But it was the right hand. Aunt Molly's red lips curled and showed her white teeth; she was like the big brown horse laying back his ears, and Mary Alice backed quickly against Mother. Everything was wrong and she did not know why; she only wanted to get away, and, turning, she hid her face against Mother and shut her eyes.

Then they were all going into the house. The house was made of new yellow boards and smelled good. There was a room with a cook stove and table, and a room with the big bed and Mary Alice's cot. It was a nice house, only Uncle Charley did not live with them any more. He lived in another house with Aunt Molly. Aunt Molly took him away, and at the gate he stopped to look back at Mother.

Mother and Mary Alice stood in the doorway and waved good-bye to Uncle Charley, but Aunt Molly did not look back. She walked fast down the road, and her red skirt switched behind her like a tail.

Mother was very busy and did not say a word. She unpacked the trunk and put on her blue apron and let down the long braid of her hair that stayed in a knot only when she was playing grown-up. For Mother was not really grown-up, like Father; she liked to sing and dress dolls and play games with toes. Only to-day she did not feel like playing. She bathed Mary Alice sternly in the tin washbasin, and swept, and got supper. Her forehead was pulled into little lumps, and her mouth was queer and tight. When Father came in from doing the chores she dished up the potatoes and cut the johnnycake and set Mary Alice on the Bible in the chair without saying anything until Father put his arms around her, and then she cuddled her head beside his chin and cried again.

"Oh, how could he? How could he?" she said.

"He didn't do it," said Father, bitterly. "He's a Northerner, and she wanted him. She got around him somehow. They say she drugged him."

Mary Alice sat amazed, holding her knife straight up in her fist. "Drugged," she said to herself. "Dragged. I drug; I dragged. She dragged herself around him. She drugged herself around him." It made a song in her mind and she began to sing it, pounding on the table with the handle of the knife until Mother startled her with a sharp, "Stop it, Mary Alice!"

Mary Alice went to sleep every night hearing the piney woods whispering together, and when she woke in her cot they were still whispering. The piney woods had no leaves, only long things like red and brown darning needles. She must not go far from the house—there were snakes in the piney woods. She might go with Mother to bring water from the spring. The water came out in the ground and made a little pool that twisted in the middle, then it ran stealthily away into shadows. The air was thick and mouldy with smells, and by the water grew a fascinating, horrible plant that ate flies.

Uncle Charley came every day to help Father dig a well

outside the kitchen door. He was busy and did not feel like playing. He dug himself down to the waist and then down to the shoulders, and then he went down into the ground in a bucket on a rope. He sent up the bucket full of red mud, and Father dumped it. Mary Alice played with the mud and made things; she set them in a row in the sun and they turned to rock. Mother said she was making mud pies, but they were not pies, they were just shapes she thought of. At noon Uncle Charley came out of the ground and washed and ate dinner. He said it was like old times to eat honest-to-gosh cooking again, and Mother looked sad. Uncle Charley should not say honest-to-gosh; it was a bad word.

"Will you stay to supper, Charley?" Mother said.

Uncle Charley made marks with his toe in the red mud. "Hang it all! yes," he said.

After supper he sat with Father on the doorstep and Mother sat near them in the rocking-chair and sang songs to them; they forgot it was bedtime. Aunt Molly came up the road in the moonlight, her face and her arms and her feet were white in the moonlight, and she stood at the edge of the piney woods and called:

"Charley!"

Mother asked her to come in, but she said, "No, thanks; I reckon we-all 'll be gitting along home."

Uncle Charley did not come any more to dig, and Father and Mother talked about it. Mother said they must be nice to Aunt Molly. She did not want to, but she pinned up her hair and put on her sunbonnet and she and Mary Alice went up the white road. Sunshine slanted through the piney woods and struck the white road. Lizards lay on the zigzag fence wagging their sleek throats, and ants went across the road in crawling lines, little red lines and big black lines. White dust was on the toes of Mary Alice's little shoes and Mother's big shoes.

They came to Uncle Charley's house. It was made of logs, and skins were spread out on the walls. The ground around it was bare and hard and hens were walking about. Large bony dogs with flapping ears stood up and growled, but Aunt Molly came to the door and said:

"Hesh up, you ornery dawgs! I'm right proud to see you-all," she said, looking at Mother's calico dress. "We-all ain't

fine like Northerners, but sech as we got is good enough for we-uns. Light 'n' come in."

Mother laughed as though she had been running; she said polite things while they went into the house. It was logs on the inside, too, and bits of daylight came through between them. Women and many children were sitting around the fireplace. They were all barefooted and wore queer gray dresses, and they all looked at Mother's dress and at Mary Alice's shoes. A woman put out a long skinny arm and pulled Mary Alice close to her. The woman's face was all deep-brown wrinkles and her chewing mouth was somehow like a frog jumping.

"Nyow here's a right peart little girl," she said. "I'd give a pretty for a little girl like you."

Mary Alice shyly said nothing, leaning against the woman's friendly knee.

Aunt Molly sat on her heels by the fireplace, mixing corn-meal and water with her fingers. She took handfuls of it and patted them flat between her hands; she made a print of her hands on each side. Mary Alice admired it very much. Then Aunt Molly laid the yellow cake in the ashes and covered it with ashes and made another.

Each woman had only one or two long yellow teeth, but they never stopped brushing them. They dipped little sticks into boxes of brown dust, and chewed, and spit into the fireplace. Mary Alice had never seen any one spit so far and so well. There was a box on the knee beside her, and she looked into it, politely. The woman understood; she dipped her stick into the box and twirled it until it was brown, and offered it to Mary Alice. Mary Alice took it eagerly, but Mother's eyes opened wide, and then she shook her head.

"She's too little yet, I'm afraid," Mother said, and her blue eyes were very blue in her pink face. "Thank the lady nicely, and put it back, Mary Alice," and Mother looked around at the faces timidly.

"My childern's dipped snuff sence they was weanlings," said the woman.

Mary Alice wanted to cry, but she let the woman take back the stick. Aunt Molly stood up, and made again that frightening sound like a laugh. Mary Alice felt queer, as though she were big and Mother little and something wanted

to hurt Mother; she went and stood with her back against Mother.

The men came tramping in. They were Aunt Molly's brothers—tall, loud men, even bigger than Uncle Charley. They hung their guns on the wall and were noisy; they slapped their big hands on Aunt Molly's shoulders, and she laughed. Aunt Molly's black eyes seemed hot, her black hair was alive. It did not hang limp like the other women's but each lock of it curled and twisted into the air. She did not look at Uncle Charley, and he did not speak to Mother. All the women sat by the fire while the men ate, and Aunt Molly went back and forth with dishes. When her feet touched the floor they seemed to bound. The corn cakes smelled good and Mary Alice was hungry, but she was afraid of the big men, and even Mother seemed strange.

Uncle Charley was the last of the men to go. He stood in the doorway turning his hat in his fingers and not looking at anybody. Then he went away, and all the women got up and began putting the children on the benches by the table and finding places themselves. Someone filled Mary Alice's tin dish with grease and meat and corn cake; there was a confusing noise of voices and tin cups rattling, a woman slapped a boy and he howled, and suddenly Mary Alice cried:

"I don't want nasty black things to eat with! Why aren't they white, Mother, like ours?"

Everybody looked at her, and Mother reached down and took her under one arm and carried her out of the house; Mary Alice did not know why. Mother did not listen to anything she said; Mother set her down hard and held her head under one arm and lifted up her skirts and struck her from behind. Mary Alice yelled with amazement and terror. Mother struck her more than once, and then said:

"Now come in this house, and eat, and don't let me hear another word out of you!"

Mary Alice sat bowed on the bench and swallowed as much as she could. She was most miserable. Afterward they went home, and all down the white road Mary Alice did not say anything, only she looked up at Mother now and then and felt confused. When they got home she hurried into the house and sat alone in a corner, holding her rag doll.

The days were forlorn. Uncle Charley did not come, Father

did not laugh, and Mother never tickled toes any more when she pulled the covers off the cot in the mornings. Father had finished the well; there was no more red clay, and in the yard there were only lizards and ants to watch.

One night Mary Alice had a dream. She dreamed that someone came tapping at the door in the night. Father said, "Who's there?" and Uncle Charley's voice answered, very low. Father got up and lighted the lamp in the kitchen and Mother got up. Mary Alice thought she sat up in bed and looked through the door into the kitchen.

Mother's long braid hung down her wrapper, and Mother said to Father: "No! I won't do it, Howard. Everything we own in the world is in this farm. You won't be driven off it while I have anything to say about it."

Father's wrinkles were deep black marks on his face above the lamp. He said, "Well, but Mary——"

"I don't believe it, anyway!" Mother said. "She couldn't hate us like that. What have we ever done to her?"

Uncle Charley's voice was there, but Mary Alice could not see Uncle Charley. Mother turned quickly and spoke toward the voice.

"Well, why don't you?" she said. "You don't belong with such people. You used to be the finest boy in Webster County, and what's she doing to you? You know it isn't true; you know I've never said a word to turn you against her, but I say it now. Yes, leave her! Married or not married, there's some things wrong in the sight of God. If you'll come with us, Charley, we'll go. We'll go back home."

Then Mary Alice heard the piney woods whispering, and she was frightened and cold and wanted to call to Mother, but did not dare.

Uncle Charley said, "It's too late, Mary."

Mother said: "It isn't too late. Yes, I say it. I don't care if you'd married her twenty times——"

Then Uncle Charley said a strange thing. He said: "Mary, you don't know—you don't know what she'd do. The moon's shining." Mother's face went all still and hard in the lamp-light. Then she was out of sight, and Mary Alice heard her crying voice, "Oh, Charley, don't! don't!" and a terrible, hoarse, gasping sound. Father coughed, and then he grew very large and very small and the terrible sounds went on

and on, until Mary Alice opened her eyes. The sounds were only the whispering of the piney woods and Mother was combing her hair in the morning.

"Where is Uncle Charley?" said Mary Alice. "Mother, is the moon shining?"

"What do you mean?" Mother exclaimed. "You've been dreaming, Mary Alice. Nobody's been here. Moonshining is a bad word. You must never say it again." Mary Alice's bewilderment opened her mouth, but Mother was so stern that she closed it again.

After breakfast Mother took Mary Alice between her knees and spoke to her seriously. "I want you to listen to me, Mary Alice," she said. "You must never eat anything that any one gives you. Never eat anything until I give it to you, or Father. Do you understand?"

"Oh, Mother," said Mary Alice, "aren't you ever going to tickle my toes again, ever, ever, any more?"

Mother scrunched her up tight in her warm, clean-smelling calico lap and arms, laughing and catching her breath. But in a minute she was stern again. "Listen, dear. You must never, never eat anything until I say you may. Do you understand? Tell me, Mary Alice."

"I must never eat anything until you say I may," said Mary Alice, remembering hard. And next morning Mother tickled her toes, but it was not as it used to be, and Mary Alice did not want Mother to do it because she was asked.

One could play in the garden, putting the peanut blossoms to bed. Mary Alice had carefully picked up the peanut blossoms and dusted them, until Father found her doing it. He laughed then, and called Mother to laugh, too. Peanut blossoms must dig down into the ground to make peanuts. So now she put them in little holes and buried them—the peanut blossoms were glad because she was helping them.

"Well, I guess we'll have to live on the peanuts," Father said. The cow was dead. He had found her in the piney woods with her legs cut, so he had had to kill her, and there would not be any little calf. Mother looked sick. She said: "How can human beings do such things! But I won't back down for them," she said; "it's like going away and leaving Charley."

There were no more peanut blossoms. Under the ground

there were peanuts, and Father was digging them up; some day Mother would roast them. The banana plant in the yard had grown taller than Mary Alice; its broad leaves hung limp and warm in the sun. Beneath it on the ground a moth fluttered; it was alive, but it was covered with ants. The ants were eating it. Mary Alice got a grass stem and fought them. She poked them off as fast as she could, but they kept coming, and the poor moth fluttered. She must not touch moths, a touch brushed the weeny little feathers off their wings, and hurt them. Mary Alice fought the ants as fast as she could, but in a moment the moth jerked, twisted up its legs, and died. Mary Alice stood up. Aunt Molly was leaning on the fence, watching her from the shadows of a sunbonnet. She did not speak, but beckoned with her hand.

"See what I've fetched you, honey," she said, like a secret. She uncurled her fingers, and on her palm was a little red ball. "It's spruce gum," she said. "It grows in the piney woods. Your Aunt Molly's fetched it and chawed it all soft for you."

She felt warm and grateful toward Aunt Molly. But Aunt Molly's eyes were strange; their look came out of them and pushed Mary Alice's gaze down. She could not look at Aunt Molly. She turned the red ball over in her hand.

"Chaw it," said Aunt Molly. "Chaw it."

It was only to chaw; it was not something to eat. Mary Alice lifted it to her mouth, and then took it down and looked at it again. But it was not to eat. The screen door slammed and she looked up guiltily.

"Mother, see!" she said. "See what Aunt Molly gave me! Mother, can I eat it? It's gum."

Mother looked at Aunt Molly. Aunt Molly stood up straight, and the sunbonnet fell back; her face came out hard and bright, and she smiled at Mother.

"Yes, Mary Alice, you may have it," said Mother, and just as joy leaped in Mary Alice, Mother's hand came down quickly and took the red ball. "After supper," she said.

Mary Alice looked up, protesting, and was struck silent. Something vast and terrible was there, in the air, invisible, coming out of the eyes of Aunt Molly and Mother. Mary Alice's legs stumbled as Mother led her by the hand into the house.

Mother sat down and took Mary Alice into her lap. She rocked her for a while and then said:

"Mary Alice, I promised you the gum, and Mother always keeps her promises. The gum is yours. Will you give it to me for a pan of peanuts?"

Mary Alice thought. She thought of the red ball, how good it looked, and she thought of hot, crackling peanuts.

"A large pan?" she asked.

"The black baking pan," said Mother.

"All right," said Mary Alice. Mother got the black baking pan and filled it with peanuts. She put the pan in the oven and shut the oven door. Then she went out. Mary Alice sat on a stool and waited. She looked at the sunshine on the floor and at the ironing board laid on the backs of the two chairs; she heard the piney woods whispering, and the safe sound of the teakettle. Now and then she sniffed. She smelled the peanuts. She smelled them very loud. She began to smell them anxiously; they smelled burning. She was trying to open the oven door when suddenly someone seized her. Mother had her tight; Mother was shaking and sobbing and laughing, her face was wet and twisted against Mary Alice's. Mary Alice shrieked aloud and struggled, screaming.

Father came in, running, the hoe in his hand. Mother cried: "She died! She's dead!" and laughed horribly.

Father shook them both. "O my God! O my God! What is it?" he said. "Answer me!"

Mother stumbled across the floor, carrying Mary Alice to the doorway. Outside, on the stain of red mud, the Plymouth Rock hen lay dead with her head on.

"I threw it to her, and she swallowed it, and died," said Mother.

And Mary Alice sincerely wept, because she had liked the hen, too. Father and Mother comforted her, and talked over her head.

There was no supper that night. Mary Alice was given a piece of bread and butter, and she was not to be put to bed. Father had hitched up the horses, and they were going back to Grandfather's. Trunks and boxes were packed and piled in the wagon, with the stove and table and chairs and the sacks of peanuts. As soon as it was dark they started.

The piney woods were shadowy in the moonlight and things without shapes moved through them; the horses' feet made dull, thudding sounds and the wagon creaked, the harness jingled. They had gone a long way, but Mary Alice was still awake when the horses shied and someone was holding on to the wheel and looking upward.

"Good-bye!" Uncle Charley panted. "I just made it in time across the hill way. I thought I'd get there and fight 'em with you. But it's better for you this way. Don't stop. Keep going. They'll be at the house in half an hour. Good-bye."

Mother leaned down to him. "Get in and come with us," she said. "Oh, Charley, how'll I ever stand it? We'll get you off, somehow, Charley. I can't go away and leave you here."

The piney woods were still, listening.

"God! Mary, I can't," Uncle Charley said. "You don't know her. She's got me. She'd have the revenuers after me to-morrow. I—I ain't got the nerve any more. You better hurry on. Good-bye. I—— Good-bye, Mary!"

Then he was gone, and Father put his arm around Mother and clucked to the horses. Mary Alice thought at first that Mother was crying, but she was not; she was quite still.

"Aren't we going to see Uncle Charley again?" Mary Alice asked.

"Hush, Mary Alice!" said Father.

The piney woods were filled with strangeness; the gray, straight trunks moved stealthily, and the road was a glimmer that went out in darkness ahead. But Mary Alice slipped away from all vague wonderings into the coziness of sleep.

GOLD-MOUNTED GUNS

By F. R. BUCKLEY

From *Red Book*

EVENING had fallen on Longhorn City, and already, to the south, an eager star was twinkling in the velvet sky, when a spare, hard-faced man slouched down the main street and selected a pony from the dozen hitched beside Tim Geogehan's general store. The town, which in the daytime suffered from an excess of eye-searing light in its open spaces, confined its efforts at artificial lighting to the one store, the one saloon, and its neighbour, the Temple of Chance; so it was from a dusky void that the hard-faced man heard himself called by name.

"Tommy!" a subdued voice accosted him.

The hard-faced man made, it seemed, a very slight movement—a mere flick of the hand at his low-slung belt; but it was a movement perfectly appraised by the man in the shadows.

"Wait a minute!" the voice pleaded.

A moment later, his hands upraised, his pony's bridle-reins caught in the crook of one arm, a young man moved into the cone of light that shone bravely out through Tim Geogehan's back window.

"Don't shoot," he said, trying to control his nervousness before the weapon unwaveringly trained on him. "I'm—a friend."

For perhaps fifteen seconds the newcomer and the hard-faced man examined each other with the unwinking scrutiny of those who take chances of life and death. The younger, with that lightning draw fresh in his mind, noted the sinister droop of a gray moustache over a hidden mouth, and shivered a little as his gaze met that of a pair of steel-blue

eyes. The man with the gun saw before him a rather handsome face, marred, even in this moment of submission, by a certain desperation.

"What do you want?" he asked, tersely.

"Can I put my hands down?" countered the other.

The lean man considered.

"All things bein' equal," he said, "I think I'd rather you'd first tell me how you got round to callin' me Tommy. Been askin' people in the street?"

"No," said the boy. "I only got into town this afternoon, an' I ain't a fool anyway. I seen you ride in this afternoon, and the way folks backed away from you made me wonder who you was. Then I seen them gold-mounted guns of yours, an' of course I knew. Nobody ever had guns like them but Pecos Tommy. I could ha' shot you while you was gettin' your horse, if I'd been that way inclined."

The lean man bit his moustache.

"Put 'em down. What do you want?"

"I want to join you."

"You want to *what*?"

"Yeah, I know it sounds foolish to you, mebbe," said the young man. "But, listen—your side-kicker's in jail down in Rosewell. I figured I could take his place—anyway, till he got out. I know I ain't got any record, but I can ride, an' I can shoot the pips out of a ten-spot at ten paces, an'—I got a little job to bring into the firm, to start with."

The lean man's gaze narrowed.

"Have, eh?" he asked, softly.

"It ain't anythin' like you go in for as a rule," said the boy, apologetically, "but it's a roll of cash an'—I guess it'll show you I'm straight. I only got on to it this afternoon. Kind of providential I should meet you right now."

The lean man chewed his moustache. His eyes did not shift.

"Yeah," he said, slowly. "What you quittin' punchin' for?"

"Sick of it."

"Figurin' robbin' trains is easier money?"

"No," said the young man, "I ain't. But I like a little spice in life. They ain't none in punchin'."

"Got a girl?" asked the lean man.

The boy shook his head. The hard-faced man nodded reflectively.

"Well, what's the job?" he asked.

The light from Geogehan's window was cut off by the body of a man who, cupping his hands about his eyes, stared out into the night, as if to locate the buzz of voices at the back of the store.

"If you're goin' to take me on," said the young man, "I can tell you while we're ridin' toward it. If you ain't—why, there's no need to go no further."

The elder slipped back into its holster the gold-mounted gun he had drawn, glanced once at the obscured window and again, piercingly, at the boy whose face now showed white in the light of the rising moon. Then he turned his pony and mounted.

"Come on," he commanded.

Five minutes later the two had passed the limits of the town, heading for the low range of hills which encircled it to the south—and Will Arblaster had given the details of his job to the unemotional man at his side.

"How do you know the old guy's got the money?" came a level question.

"I saw him come out of the bank this afternoon, grinnin' all over his face an' stuffin' it into his pants-pocket," said the boy. "An' when he was gone, I kind of inquired who he was. His name's Sanderson, an' he lives in this yer cabin right ahead a mile. Looked kind of a soft old geezer—kind that'd give up without any trouble. Must ha' been quite some cash there, judgin' by the size of the roll. But I guess when *you* ask him for it, he won't mind lettin' it go."

"I ain't goin' to ask him," said the lean man. "This is your job."

The boy hesitated.

"Well, if I do it right," he asked, with a trace of tremor in his voice, "will you take me along with you sure?"

"Yeah—I'll take you along."

The two ponies rounded a shoulder of the hill: before the riders there loomed, in the moonlight, the dark shape of a cabin, its windows unlighted. The lean man chuckled.

"He's out."

Will Arblaster swung off his horse.

"Maybe," he said, "but likely the money ain't. He started off home, an' if he's had to go out again, likely he's hid the money some place. Folks know *you're* about. I'm goin' to see."

Stealthily he crept toward the house. The moon went behind a cloud-bank, and the darkness swallowed him. The lean man, sitting his horse, motionless, heard the rap of knuckles on the door—then a pause, the rattle of the latch. A moment later there came the heavy thud of a shoulder against wood—a cracking sound, and a crash as the door went down. The lean man's lips tightened. From within the cabin came the noise of one stumbling over furniture, then the fitful fire of a match illumined the windows. In the quiet, out there in the night, the man on the horse, twenty yards away, could hear the clumping of the other's boots on the rough board floor, and every rustle of the papers that he fumbled in his search. Another match scratched and sputtered, and then, with a hoarse cry of triumph, was flung down. Running feet padded across the short grass and Will Arblaster drew up, panting.

"Got it!" he gasped. "The old fool! Put it in a tea-canister right on the mantelshelf. Enough to choke a horse! Feel it!"

The lean man, unemotional as ever, reached down and took the roll of money.

"Got another match?" he asked.

Willie struck one, and panting, watched while his companion, moistening a thumb, ruffled through the bills.

"Fifty tens," said the lean man. "Five hundred dollars. Guess I'll carry it."

His cold blue eyes turned downward, and focused again with piercing attention on the younger man's upturned face. The bills were stowed in a pocket of the belt right next one of those gold-mounted guns which, earlier in the evening, had covered Willie Arblaster's heart. For a moment, the lean man's hand seemed to hesitate over its butt; then, as Willie smiled and nodded, it moved away. The match burned out.

"Let's get out of here," the younger urged; whereupon the hand which had hovered over the gun-butt grasped Will Arblaster's shoulder.

"No, not yet," he said quietly, "not just yet. Get on your hawss, an' set still awhile."

The young man mounted. "What's the idea?"

"Why!" said the level voice at his right. "This is a kind of novelty to me. Robbin' trains, you ain't got any chance to see results, like: this here's different. Figure this old guy'll be back pretty soon. I'd like to see what he does when he finds his wad's gone. Ought to be amusin'!"

Arblaster chuckled uncertainly.

"Ain't he liable to——"

"He can't see us," said the lean man with a certain new cheerfulness in his tone. "An' besides, he'll think we'd naturally be miles away; an' besides that, we're mounted, all ready."

"What's that?" whispered the young man, laying a hand on his companion's arm.

The other listened.

"Probably him," he said. "Now stay still."

There were two riders—by their voices, a man and a girl: they were laughing as they approached the rear of the house, where, roughly made of old boards, stood Pa Sanderson's substitute for a stable. They put up the horses; then their words came clearer to the ears of the listeners, as they turned the corner of the building, walking toward the front door.

"I feel mean about it, anyhow," said the girl's voice. "You going on living here, Daddy, while——"

"Tut-tut-tut!" said the old man. "What's five hundred to me? I ain't never had that much in a lump, an' shouldn't know what to do with it if I had. 'Sides, your Aunt Elviry didn't give it you for nothin'. 'If she wants to go to college,' says she, 'let her prove it by workin'. I'll pay half, but she's got to pay t'other half.' Well, you worked, an'—— Where on earth did I put that key?"

There was a silence, broken by the grunts of the old man as he contorted himself in the search of his pockets: and then the girl spoke: the tone of her voice was the more terrible for the restraint she was putting on it.

"Daddy—the—the—did you leave the money in the house?"

"Yes. What is it?" cried the old man.

"Daddy—the door's broken down, and——"

There was a hoarse cry: boot-heels stumbled across the boards, and again a match flared. Its pale light showed a girl standing in the doorway of the cabin, her hands clasped on her bosom—while beyond the wreckage of the door a bent figure with silver hair tottered away from the mantelshef. In one hand Pa Sanderson held the flickering match, in the other a tin box.

"Gone!" he cried in his cracked voice. "Gone!"

Willie Arblaster drew a breath through his teeth and moved uneasily in his saddle. Instantly a lean, strong hand, with a grip like steel, fell on his wrist and grasped it. The man behind the hand chuckled.

"Listen!" he said.

"Daddy—Daddy—don't take on so—please don't," came the girl's voice, itself trembling with repressed tears. There was a scrape of chair-legs on the floor as she forced the old man into his seat by the fireplace. He hunched there, his face in his hands, while she struck a match and laid the flame to the wick of the lamp on the table. As it burned up she went back to her father, knelt by him, and threw her arms about his neck.

"Now, now, now!" she pleaded. "Now, Daddy, it's all right. Don't take on so. It's all right."

But he would not be comforted.

"I can't replace it!" cried Pa Sanderson, dropping trembling hands from his face. "It's gone! Two years you've been away from me; two years you've slaved in a store; and now I've——"

"Hush, hush!" the girl begged. "Now, Daddy—it's all right. I can go on working, and——"

With a convulsive effort, the old man got to his feet. "Two years more slavery, while some skunk drinks your money, gambles it—throws it away!" he cried. "Curse him! Whoever it is, curse him! Where's God's justice? What's a man goin' to believe when years of scrapin' like your aunt done, an' years of slavin' like yours in Laredo there, an' all our happiness to-day can be wiped out by a damned thief in a minute?"

The girl put her little hand over her father's mouth.

"Don't, Daddy," she choked. "It only makes it worse.

Come and lie down on your bed, and I'll make you some coffee. Don't cry, Daddy darling. Please."

Gently, like a mother with a little child, she led the heart-broken old man out of the watchers' line of vision, out of the circle of lamplight. More faintly, but still with heartrending distinctness, the listeners could hear the sounds of weeping.

The lean man sniffed, chuckled, and pulled his bridle.

"Some circus!" he said appreciatively. "C'mon, boy."

His horse moved a few paces, but Will Arblaster's did not. The lean man turned in his saddle.

"Ain't you comin'?" he asked.

For ten seconds, perhaps, the boy made no answer. Then he urged his pony forward until it stood side by side with his companion's.

"No," he said. "An'—an' I ain't goin' to take that money, neither."

"Huh?"

The voice was slow and meditative.

"Don't know as ever I figured what this game meant," he said. "Always seemed to me that all the hardships was on the stick-up man's side—gettin' shot at an' chased and so on. Kind of fun, at that. Never thought 'bout—old men cryin'."

"That ain't my fault," said the lean man.

"No," said Will Arblaster, still very slowly. "But I'm goin' to take that money back. You didn't have no trouble gettin' it, so you don't lose nothin'."

"Suppose I say I won't let go of it?" suggested the lean man with a sneer.

"Then," snarled Arblaster, "I'll blow your damned head off an' take it! Don't you move, you! I've got you covered. I'll take the money out myself."

His revolver muzzle under his companion's nose, he snapped open the pocket of the belt and extracted the roll of bills. Then, regardless of a possible shot in the back, he swung off his horse and shambled, with the mincing gait of the born horseman, into the lighted doorway of the cabin. The lean man, unemotional as ever, sat perfectly still, looking alternately at the cloud-dappled sky and at the cabin, from which now came a murmur of voices harmonizing with a strange effect of joy, to the half-heard bass of the night-wind.

It was a full ten minutes before Will Arblaster reappeared

in the doorway alone, and made, while silhouetted against the light, a quick movement of his hand across his eyes, then stumbled forward through the darkness toward his horse. Still the lean man did not move.

"I'm—sorry," said the boy as he mounted. "But——"

"I ain't," said the lean man quietly. "What do you think I made you stay an' watch for, you young fool?"

The boy made no reply. Suddenly the hair prickled on the back of his neck and his jaw fell.

"Say," he demanded hoarsely at last. "Ain't you Pecos Tommy?"

The lean man's answer was a short laugh.

"But you got his guns, an' the people in Longhorn all kind of fell back!" the boy cried. "If you ain't him, who are you?"

The moon had drifted from behind a cloud and flung a ray of light across the face of the lean man as he turned it, narrow-eyed, toward Arblaster. The pallid light picked out with terrible distinctness the grim lines of that face—emphasized the cluster of sun-wrinkles about the corners of the piercing eyes and marked as if with underscoring black lines the long sweep of the fighting jaw.

"Why," said the lean man dryly, "I'm the sheriff that killed him yesterday. Let's be ridin' back."

AS A DOG SHOULD

By CHARLES ALEXANDER

From Collier's

A HUGE car, silent, implacable, and shiny as a shell-backed monster, rolled out of its lair and slowed to a stop on the paved track crossing the lawn. At its appearance Umpqua, a little so-called dog, of a type and size to back into a tomato can and defy the world, leaped from a crêpe-de-chine lap and streaked across the grass. He stood beside the car and, head tipped a little sidewise, expectantly eyed the driver.

The Doctor got out, produced a carrying apparatus, and began clamping it on to the running board. As he worked he said to the dog: "Don't worry, Ump, we're not going anywhere to-day. Besides, if we were, you couldn't go."

The voices of girls called from the lawn. The summer afternoon was warm. A little breeze loafed among the roses, occasionally spilling a few petals on the ground. Alene, the younger daughter, with long white hands and sure young eyes, came and watched the Doctor, sitting with a cushion between her shoulders and the trunk of a mountain ash that served its lonely sentence beside the drive.

Ump would not be inveigled into her lap and her long hands. Perfectly still he stood, only his bright brown eyes moving as he watched the Doctor fussing about the car. Many times Ump's eyes had followed the Doctor and the shiny monster down the drive and out—upon the strange white road.

Where the road led Ump did not dream. He was incapable of dreaming its possible destination, since he never had followed it, or any road, to any destination. Nothing had he followed but the walks and paths among the lawns

and gardens that led, all of them, back upon themselves, back to the high doorways of the bulky white house. They were adventures in themselves, these paths, especially at sunrise, when the grass glistened and fat slugs threaded through it. Ump had a habit of stealthily exploring the paths each morning.

But the road was something else again. He had a habit, too, of following the shiny car, when he could escape fondling hands and laps, as far as the pillars of the gate. Here he could see the road; could see a distance along it; could see, if he stood up with one paw on the pillar, a vast sea of yellow fields, and beyond—in the infinite beyond—blue hills heaped like breastworks around the valley.

He could not even dream of these, either, since he did not know what hills were. No man's dog was Ump. He was a fondling, bred and reared to be cuddled in *crêpe-de-chine* laps and petted by idle white hands. Alene's sure eyes, and the Doctor's wise ones, could see no hint of the shaggy monster that stirred in him as he stood at the gate and glimpsed the hills while the great car crept out on the road, bearing the master—Ump's man-master—away. Always, when the gate closed, he slowly returned to his duties as toy and fondling.

This day the gate did not open. While Ump watched, the Doctor lugged strange cases, packages, canvas paraphernalia, out of the house and to the car. He packed and repacked them, carefully disregarding all the advice that Alene generously tendered him. Last of all was a strapped bundle of books. Alene laughed about them and told Ump how funny it was.

Then the Doctor squeezed himself into what was left of the driver's seat. The car purred a little. Ump turned toward the gate. The car moved. But it moved backward, and vanished inside the garage. In the middle of the drive Ump stood, his ears pointed, puzzling at this suspicious and unheard-of manœuvre. He had been awaiting his glimpse of the hills, but the gate had not opened. He was disappointed, and suddenly very determined. He ran from Alene, hid behind the mountain ash, and there spent the night. Nor did the magic of the night soothe him.

"Ump! Ump, you rascal. Where are you? Umpqua, come here."

It was early morning; the car stood outside the gate, eagerly humming, and its four passengers were impatient for the start. There were the Doctor and Alene, and his first daughter, an empty-handed wife, and Ray, her empty-headed husband. All looked back at the house and grounds. From the gate Thomas anxiously looked at them.

"Where's Ump? Have you seen Ump?" barked the Doctor.

"No, sir, but I'll look."

"Well, look later. We're going."

"Tell Ump good-bye for me, Thomas," sang Alene as the gears shifted. "Don't forget his milk. At eight and at five."

Thomas closed the gate. The car started. Ump got up from the dust as the car passed from over him. He trotted close beside it, hopped on the running board, crouched against the fender. Then they were whizzing down the white road, the out road, the Umpqua valley was sliding behind them, the Umpqua range approaching, the ancient wind singing to them its ancient song. And the Doctor raised his own voice:

*Yonder the Far Horizon lies,
and there, by night and day,
The old ships sail to port again,
the young ships sail away;
And come I may, but go I must,
and if men ask you why,
You may place the blame on the
stars and the sun
And the white road, and the sky.*

The Doctor did not know that Umpqua, too, braced on the running board, heard the song of the wind; heard and felt more than he or any of them heard or felt. Such strange, such subtle, things, indeed, the wind from off the mountains poured into Umpqua's ears and nose that he forgot after a while his fear of his footing on the lurching board, and unconsciously crept forward. He crawled past the fore door.

along the hood, put his feet on the lamp, and stretched forward.

He could not stretch far enough. He thrust his nose well out into the wind. It tore at him, drove into his nostrils—and he stretched farther, climbed upon the lamp itself, until half his body was ahead of the car. The wind from the mountains blew through him, blew into his blood. He was drunk on the words and music of it, its shouted knowledge and whispered secrets, that were like patches of flame swirling and eddying in the driving substance. The air was green, almost palpable, seemingly alive. Ump was like a weather vane pointed into it.

The people in the car shouted. The Doctor even swore, damning the little fyste that had stowed away on his car. Alene shrieked to Ump to come back, lest he be killed. And none of them noticed the rut until the front wheels struck it and the car plunged and lurched.

“Stop, Daddy,” cried Alene.

“Stop yourself,” snorted the Doctor. “Let the little devil go back home. I’ve taught him to stay home. He knows better than to sneak out and get on this car. We can’t look out for him in the mountains. Some jackrabbit would eat him. Let him be; he’ll go home.”

And Ump, picking himself up from the dust, saw a rapidly vanishing car and a trail of hieroglyphics in the road that the tires had left.

Next morning, as camp was breaking in the foothills, he limped along those hieroglyphics, a little white mite crawling between two walls of giant trees. And Alene, now a slim khaki figure, ran and gathered him up.

She said nothing to the Doctor. He could not now say anything. The fyste had won his right to ride.

Ump was changed. He allowed Alene to gather him into her lap, and he was too exhausted to nibble the sandwich she saved for him. But when the car started up the dank road, into the black-forested Umpquas, he stirred. He got to the side of the seat, hung his head over, pointed it into the wind.

They stopped at a spring, and Ump, too, must drink. He declined to reënter the car. Alene pleaded. The Doctor got out and drove him around and around. He retreated under the car.

"Let the little fool walk," growled the Doctor. "He'll be nothing but a nuisance to us on the whole trip. If he gets back home alive, it will be a miracle."

When he slammed the door, Ump jumped aboard, climbed along the fender, and took up his perch on the headlight.

"He's crazy," said the Doctor. "Crazy on air."

"I don't see why a civilized dog should insist on standing out there with his nose pointed, as if he were on the trail of a cougar or something," said Alene.

The Doctor was indignant. "Civilized? Ump isn't civilized; he never was civilized; he was just sick, and now he's getting well." Which was as close to profundity as the Doctor had come in all his studious life.

Thus Ump finished the journey, while the mountains closed in like a presence, so that even the people in the car fell silent. He clung upon the lamp, his eyes wet and blinded, his nose stretched forward as far as he could stretch it. He did not shift position. He never looked aside. All his tiny being was listening, sensing, feeling those thousand ancient voices in the ancient wind. And they became more than sudden sibilant voices. They became forms and phantoms, glimpses of vague forms and shaggy phantoms that seemed, to Ump, to come streaming down the wind to him.

At noon they made permanent camp on a little flat high in the Umpquas. When Ump saw this he climbed down from the lamp. He did not run to them in play, though he was conscious in a new way of his duty to them. He was not the Ump of old. He was no longer sick. This was his own country; he was a wanderer returned to his heath. Whatever strange people lived here were his people. Yet, paradoxically, they were enemy people. He knew that, knew it without question, knew it indubitably, for the wind told him.

While the Doctor and Ray pitched the tents, Ump stealthily crawled across the glade to the great bleached snag stretched from the forest on one hand to the roaring little river on the other. It was a huge snag, six feet high as it lay, and two hundred feet long, fire-smitten out of the father forest of the present forest. Ump managed, with the aid of a leaning limb, to climb upon it. Thence he made his way toward its fortress-like butt, at the river.

Slowly, cautiously, he advanced. He was in the midst of a

thousand mighty dangers. Near him the Doctor puffed and shouted as he swung a hand axe, but Ump was silent and wide-eyed. He knew what he knew, which was what the air and the feel of it told him; he knew that this was no time for careless shouting. Along the log seas of tree fern swarmed, as high as the log's white top, so that it formed a wooden road through the surface of the fern brake. Down this road crept Ump. At the butt the roots stuck up like a wall; Ump climbed among them, stuck his nose out, looked, and listened.

The forest was still. The great firs, like aged prophets, crooned a little high above. In the river was a group of subdued voices, as though a clan of hunters, heads together, muttered over their plans. Beneath the great firs, cavern after gloomy cavern opened out. And as Ump watched he saw the Wilderness. He saw one of his own people—his enemy friends. He froze, a little white speck up among the roots, scarcely drawing breath.

It was a smooth tawny body. Only for an instant did he see it. It came out of the gloom, lightly leaped over a brown log, disappeared in the gloom. It was only a shadow of tawnniness, a hint of a sinuous body. But the clean white fangs glinted in the twilight forest. And from them a limp body hung, a body that would have made many creatures the size of Ump. And Ump knew: the white fangs, the lifeless body hanging from them—these were the Wilderness. Somewhere he had known it all before—when and how he did not know.

The paunchy Doctor was industriously sharpening a peg when Ump flung upon him. The little dog seemed crazed. He danced around the man, yelped, tried to tell him of the great fanged enemy in the forest. He scrambled back on the snag, ran its length, took a long look into the gloom where the beast had appeared, and ran back.

The Doctor's fat hand swept Ump aside. "Get away," he growled. "Go lie down. Did you see a mouse?"

Ump, humiliated, slunk off, the stub of his tail trying to sneak between his legs. Alene reached to pick him up. He growled a quavery, fierce little growl that bade her mind her own affairs. He found a shoe box and crawled into it, turning about so as to fasten his eyes on the huge Doctor.

Ump was loyal. Here, in the presence of enemies, he was beginning to find his own relationship to his master. For the first time in his life he felt an overwhelming love for the master. From every hand came squalls and cries that he alone understood. The intense reality of them (to him) made him wild to rush and tell the whole thing to the Doctor.

He felt important. He and he alone understood the cries and squalls, heard the overtone of hidden life, felt the full meaning of that single picture he had seen of tawny body and white fangs. He wished to rush up to his master and tell him these important things.

Yet that was wholly ridiculous, as his one attempt showed. Back at the house in the valley Ump had had no duties and no cause to serve his master; wherefore he had no cause to love him. He had amused himself with superficial cunning, stealing a pound of butter when the refrigerator door was open, or killing a barred-rock hen occasionally and suffering a gentle beating in consequence. And he had amused the Doctor's daughters in about the same way that dolls had once amused them.

Here in the forest he suddenly discovered meaning and purpose in his own existence. It was unnamable, indefinable, but none the less real. Looking at the man, Ump knew that he loved him. He forgot that he was a pitiful little house dog, felt instead that he was Dog, man's dog, standing beside his majestic master and facing a world where fangs gleamed in the darkness and huge, vague bodies crept and leaped.

He did not sulk for long. The voices called and challenged him. Crawling across the clearing, he spent an hour venturing, a step at a time, into the forest. He came to the base of a fir, and discovered a world of trembling sensations in sneaking around it. He examined everything with his eyes; there were a thousand things to see, and each, to Ump, was crammed with baffling memories and with wisps and shreds and suggestions of memories that had never before come alive within his brain. Suddenly, from a clump of vine maple, a horrible torrent of maledictions poured on him—coarse curses, jeering screams, guttural threats. Down the tree trunk a brown body flashed, leaped to a log, stared at Ump. That was a yellow-bellied pine squirrel, and far above another squirrel purred and chirruped. The camp-robber jay that

had cursed him went off into another thicket, mockery and ridicule floating back.

Ump, eyes fastened on the round eyes of the squirrel, boiled with excitement. The shadowy, shaggy things were materializing. He stood frozen, glaring at the yellow-belly; the latter glared down from the log, jerked his body nervously, sat up and shrieked a defy at Ump. The squirrel's teeth were bowed and curved like little sabres. His blue-brown fur was mysteriously soft.

A step at a time, eyes glued on the squirrel, Ump crept over the brown moss. He came to the log. The yellow-belly stooped, barked at him, jerked right and left to startle Ump, and worked himself into a fury. And thereat Ump made his mistake.

He backed off.

Like a flash the blustering squirrel leaped, being careful to land well away from Ump. But Ump, at the leap, was suffocated with terror. He turned and ran.

Back at camp the four busy people were treated to a rare sight. Ump, a white, frightened ball, fled for the tent.

One jump behind him, coming in great, sailing bounds, was a fat yellow-belly. At every jump toward Ump's heels the yellow-belly barked his righteous indignation. At every bark Ump fled the faster. And when he shot inside the tent, burying himself in a pile of blankets, the squirrel stood up and hurled his choicest abuse at the white tent.

The Doctor roared until he was weak. He sat down and roared; then he lay in the fern and continued to roar. And finally, propped on an elbow, he called Ump forth and mercilessly kidded him:

"You're some dog, now, aren't you, Ump? A regular he-dog. By golly, you'll show these fuzzy monsters of the forest what it is to meet up with a real man's dog. But you want to be careful. This is a wild and dangerous neck o' woods. A mouse might catch you out alone and bite your ears off."

Ray and Mrs. Ray laughed. Alene comforted her pet.

"Don't you mind them, Ump. You're all right, and you and I know it, don't we? Besides, he *can* kill things. I've seen him."

"I never saw him kill anything but warm milk. What did he kill?"

"Well, it was only a beetle. But it was a big beetle, shiny and horrible. Ump boxed it with his paws. Then he bit it."

"Good for Ump," cried the Doctor. "I'll buy him a medal."

"Besides, that was an awfully big squirrel. He looked mad, too. And he had the—the drop on Ump."

"I hope to tell you!" chuckled the Doctor. "That is, he almost—and would have, if Ump hadn't broken the canine speed limit. I never saw him move like that before, even at mealtime. You're all right, Ump. Any dog that can project himself through space like that deserves a pension."

Ump looked his reproach, escaped from Alene, and hid within the tent. He had wanted to defend his master, to fill his place as a dog should. And at the first danger he had fled.

In the tent he stayed until nightfall. Then he nosed his way out at the back of the tent, and around the edge of the shadows that the fire before the tent threw into the darkness. Around the fire the campers sat on canvas stools, the Doctor with a book in his hands, Ray meditating on the trout possibilities of the river.

"I scouted down it a ways," he said. "Fine water. There's a deep place under a bluff, just below the end of that dead snag, where there are some big beauties. But you can't get 'em out of that water. It's clear as glass."

"Oh, yes, you can if you do it right," drawled the Doctor. "Sneak up on 'em and tease 'em to the top."

"You'll have to show me," said Ray. "I'm not going to waste time there. But I saw some monsters in that pool."

The Doctor smiled, and made his own plans. He read some ancient knowledge out of his book, felt very well satisfied, and led the retreat to the cots.

Yet, perhaps, the wisdom that he found in his printed pages did not compare with what Ump felt abroad in the wilderness night. He had climbed the snag again and crouched hidden among its roots, staring into the black forest. Long into the night he lay motionless, teeming inwardly with thrill after thrill.

Behind him the fern lay in billows like a silver sea. The air brought to his nose a hundred wild tales. From everywhere came voices, voice upon voice, yet strangely combining

in one continuous undertone. In the wall of the night before him were eyes—flashing green or burning red like coals, and always in pairs, always two by two. The whole night was eyes. The vast blue-black sky blinked with them. And there, too, they seemed always to blink in pairs.

Under the forest were occasional rustlings, when red eyes swirled together, and at times a squall came from afar. Somewhere arose the kittenish *meow* of a lost fawn; later the bleat and snort of a doe came, and angry snarls.

Silvery wings floated down; above Ump a wood bat had caught a hawk moth, clipping his wings off in flight. The little lapdog's blood pounded. He felt near to bursting. Here, around him, in shadowy shapes, were the living things whose calls had come to him even in the valley. He was facing them, the things he should, as a loyal dog, face for his sleeping master.

Before the tent the fire died down to embers; around Ump life in all its olden meanings held forth. He heard a scratching on the log. Far down it a lithe shape climbed over, and he saw, for an instant, glowing red coals, two by two. Aslant the high sky great wings fluttered, and a snapping of beaks came out of the air.

This was the place, on guard before his master's camp. Overwhelmed by the glory of it, Ump leaped from the snag.

It was a long leap; he landed on his nose. But he ran, tripping in the fern, until he stood in the forest. And he barked wildly, defiantly, at all the threatening death, all the life, all the shadows and red eyes and glistening fangs.

Then, his challenge unanswered, he raced into the tent, barking a summons to his master. He was no longer a fyste; he had forgotten himself and his place.

He was a dog, a proper dog, huge and shaggy, royally great as the dogs his blood had come down from had been great and loyal. He was telling his master of the enemies without, bidding him come and kill.

The Doctor saw it otherwise. He grunted himself awake, got the vociferous Ump by the neck, and punctuated his remarks with sharp whacks of a boot. And then he got a tin bucket, advised Ump for good and all to hold his peace, and clapped the bucket over him.

The Doctor slept no more, not because of Ump's warning,

but because dawn was at hand, and he had certain gleeful plans for showing his son-in-law how to extract wary old trout from the deep pool, all before breakfast.

When the others were again asleep, he carefully got into his khaki, jointed up his split bamboo, and ducked outside. He did not hear the tin bucket suddenly overturn as he went through the wet fern for the river. He would not have appreciated it had he known that Ump was out to protect his master in the forest.

He followed the snag, turned down the river a quarter of a mile, and came to the bluff. It towered above the important little stream, only a ledge twenty feet above the water permitting passage. To cast from this ledge took all of the Doctor's skill. But his wrist had lost none of its cunning. His fly flicked the pool for an instant, skipped away, touched the wimples again. A brown flash split the water. The Doctor whipped a wimple farther upstream; the great trout followed.

He struck. The Doctor held his pole rigid. He forgot to play the trout. The silk line snapped.

Behind him on the ledge was an ominous rattle of unsheathed claws on rock. He wheeled, his pole held upright.

And there was the Unknown, the thing that does not happen, the thing undreamed. He was face to face with the wilderness, up against what men were up against ere ever they placed word upon paper.

A cougar was flattened on the ledge between him and camp. It was twenty feet away—one leap. Nine feet it stretched to the tip of its heavy tail, and that tail whipped from side to side against the rocks. Its shoulders bulged above its sinuous body.

Almost soundlessly it snarled, its mouth vast, its little ears flattened on its tigerish head. The Doctor stared. As a matter of knowledge, he knew that cougars seldom attack. Yet as he stared it crept forward, and what he read in its yellow-notch eyes any man, however unlearned, would have read and known for truth.

He tried to think. He could not go around the cougar. He dared not turn and run. He took a tentative step backward.

That, too, was dangerous. The cougar slid forward,

covered half the space between them. He knew it was fatal to step backward, but he did not know why—did not know that a den in the ledge behind him held three striped kittens, did not know that the cougar's heavy dugs ached with motherhood. His move backward brought him closer to her young, and made her rage flame higher.

He thought of weapons. The cougar slowly crawled. He saw the slender pole in his hand. Carefully he lowered it, touched the cat's nose, whipped her nose gently.

That annoyed her. She struck at the pole with a paw that could have broken a stallion's back. His own popping eyes riveted on hers, the Doctor continued to whip her.

But that was only a makeshift. It distracted her for a moment, but it teased her, fanned her rage. Her tail lashed. She would leap. Something must happen—*something*.

The man and the cougar heard it at the same instant. The cat half whirled, presenting a mouthful of white, saberlike teeth.

It was Ump. He came flying like a ball of white fluff. He did not hesitate. He forgot that he was a mite of a dog, dreamed again that he was great and shaggy, hip-high on his master, armed with terrible jaws to lock on a tiger's throat, and strength to hurl a tiger down.

He had been made by man into a lapling, a pitiful plaything for sorry women; yet his master was in danger, and Ump was dog.

Snarling a terrible little snarl, he flew into the cougar's face. There was a sudden storm of tawny arms and legs. During that storm the fat Doctor ran. Even Ump, running from an indignant squirrel, had not run as the Doctor ran.

That day the party drove out of the hills, down a dank lane between two walls of crooning forest. The wind sang all the old songs. The car struck all the ruts. The Doctor's eyes wandered again and again to a front lamp that was covered with prints of tiny muddy feet.

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

BY RICHMOND BROOKS BARRETT

From *Smart Set*

I

ON WEDNESDAY evenings Mrs. William Dent and Thomas Edgeworth dined with their mother. Old Mrs. Edgeworth always made a point, on these occasions, of wearing stiffly brocaded gowns and an extravagant array of jewels. Sargent had painted a merciless portrait of her in just such a costume; she had chuckled drily over it, christened herself a "Holbein hag" and despatched the canvas to Mrs. Dent as a birthday gift. Grimly filial, Mrs. Dent had hung the thing in her drawing room; by way of eloquent comment, however, she had placed a sepia print of Whistler's mother near by.

Mrs. Edgeworth never failed to enjoy her daughter's Wednesday evening mood of suppressed irritability. Mrs. Dent was always dignified and polite in her treatment of the old woman. She was a stout, maternal creature who boasted of the fact that not once in her useful life had she consciously wounded another. If her eyebrows criticized, her words were consistent in their forbearing sweetness.

"It's rather too bad, Charlotte, that you never had any children," Mrs. Edgeworth sometimes commented. "This being a mother to the whole world is a large order—even for your great nature." Her words would have a satiric bite.

"There are certain tragedies one would prefer not to talk about." Charlotte's patient gaze would be fixed on one of Mrs. Edgeworth's celebrated Madonnas as she spoke. She would be careful, at such times, to avoid her mother's sharp

eyes. The old woman had her opinion as to the glowingly healthy Charlotte's childless state. Her obvious scepticism on the subject was a perpetual cross to the younger woman.

"By the way, Mother," Mrs. Dent remarked gently one Wednesday evening, "I'm afraid you haven't noticed my new gown."

"New gown?" Mrs. Edgeworth showed surprise. As a matter of fact, she had already taken in with amused thoroughness the aggressively simple severity of Charlotte's costume. "I thought you never had one."

Charlotte smiled.

"I don't wonder you thought so," she acknowledged, with ill-concealed pride. "But when one has to appear on the platform, one mustn't be out at the elbows."

Charlotte's conversation was ever rich in "ones"; she avoided the vulgar "I" whenever possible.

Mrs. Edgeworth busied herself with her lobster. She was aware that her daughter had thrown out two hints that required development. The new gown was to serve as a tactful point of departure for a lesson in economy; the modest mention of the "platform" would be enlarged to show forth Mrs. Dent's theory of one's duty to the public. Ever since her husband's death she had devoted herself to the spiritual elevation of the masses.

Charlotte, waiting to be pressed for particulars, cleared her throat. Mrs. Edgeworth was still occupied in picking at her lobster.

"I have discovered a splendid little seamstress." It was characteristic of Mrs. Dent to employ the epithet "little" in connection with any woman who worked for a living. "She is *very* reasonable and doesn't waste the cloth." She was addressing her brother Thomas, hoping to draw her mother's attention by thus pointedly turning away from her.

Thomas showed intense interest in the communication. It was his way of conveying a rebuke to the frivolous old woman.

"I see!" he exclaimed with knitted brows, as if he had seized upon the meaning of words that, in their subtlety, would have baffled a less clever man.

Mrs. Edgeworth laughed.

"No, she doesn't waste the cloth," she murmured. "The waist's indecently tight in front."

It was Mrs. Dent's opportunity now to change the subject and thus prevent her mother from indulging in further vulgar remarks of a personal nature.

She leaned forward, her eyes dwelling tenderly on Thomas.

"Our drive starts to-morrow morning," she said, enunciating with as great distinctness as if her brother were deaf.

"Another drive!" Mrs. Edgeworth, with her beady eyes on her plate, seemed to be confiding in her maimed lobster. "Good Lord, how can there be a soul still left to be saved after all these years of aggressive campaigning?"

Thomas and his sister ignored their mother's mumbled comment.

"If there's anything I can do for you, don't hesitate to call on me, Charlotte," Thomas urged.

Mrs. Dent laughed.

"I may have to take you up on that, Thomas," she warned him, archly. "I must give a little talk every evening for the next fortnight. My voice *may* desert me." She lowered it at once, as if to safeguard it for her public. "These lecture halls! The dust seems to sift into one's lungs. But *you* know how it is." That last statement, soldering brother and sister in a bond of martyrdom, delicately excluded their ribald mother.

"I have prepared careful notes for each lecture," Mrs. Dent pursued. "If I do fall by the way, you and I could go over the outlines together and you could take my place. My understudy, so to speak." She acknowledged her irrepressible sense of humour by shaking her head in apology for the quaint witticism.

"I must send you a check in the morning," Thomas murmured. "To whom shall I make it payable?" He had taken out a little notebook and had the pencil poised.

"To me—as president." Charlotte lowered her eyes in elaborate humility.

Then Thomas spoke to his mother in a tone that was full of staunch championship of his sister's cause. "And you'll of *course* send your check also, Mother?"

"And who's to be given a leg up out of the mire this time?" the old woman wanted to know.

Her children exchanged pained glances.

"Evidently you don't read the papers." Thomas was stern.

"Only the murders on the front page," Mrs. Edgeworth confessed.

Charlotte at that took up the cudgels for herself. "Tomorrow morning the drive for the Girl Scouts of America will be launched," she announced, dramatically. "I believe—indeed I *hope*—that you are the only mother in the United States who has known nothing of it till this late hour."

"I daresay." Mrs. Edgeworth didn't sound contrite, however. "As to sending a check in the morning—I'll do nothing of the kind, Thomas. I don't approve of your Girl Scouts; I have no desire to see a seething mass of Gene Stratton Porters taking twittering possession of our land."

"Ah!" Charlotte's monosyllable had the quality of a distressed sigh. She closed her lips tight, and, sending a glance of mute appeal in her brother's direction, bowed her head.

"Besides, I can't afford to give a cent to anything just now," the old woman pursued.

"Sometimes I don't *wonder* there are socialists in this world." Thomas informed her sharply. "When a wealthy woman like you refuses to acknowledge any duty in the disposal of that wealth——"

"But think of all I've done for people," Mrs. Edgeworth protested. "Bernard Berenson and the Duveens, for example!"

She wagged her head maliciously at her son and in her twinkling eyes there was a gleam of derisive scorn.

"Why did God give *me* such children, I wonder?" she cried.

"You say you can't afford to give anything." Thomas's air now resembled that of a criminal lawyer intent on wresting the truth from his victim. "May I ask why that is, Mother?"

Mrs. Edgeworth, however, was quite willing to admit the facts at once; she had no intention of humouring her son in his third-degree tactics. "I purchased a Botticelli Madonna this morning—that's why, Thomas."

Charlotte indulged in a slight shudder and pushed her plate from her. Her mother's statement had evidently had the effect of taking away her appetite.

"One does feel the sinfulness of extravagance at a time like this," she murmured. "The money paid for a small piece of canvas would have given hundreds of delicate young girls, with weak lungs, a fortnight in some mountain camp. But one doesn't think of that till it's too late." With great generosity, she was implying that her mother had been just rash and thoughtless, not consciously stony-hearted.

"How touching, Charlotte!" Mrs. Edgeworth cried. "But I may as well confess that I've been deliberating all day about another picture—an 'Epiphany' of Gentile da Fabriano's." This news was received in grim silence by Mrs. Dent and her brother. "Yes—*fancy* it! Did you ever hear of such luck?"

The old woman seemed to be taking for granted her children's boisterous enthusiasm on the subject.

"I don't wonder you're amazed," she went on slyly. "I really can't afford it at present; but I've decided to snatch it up, anyhow. You know how it is: there are certain chances one can't let go by——"

Thomas interrupted his mother's ecstasy.

"I think," he remarked to Charlotte, "that, provided I steel myself to some drastic skimping in the next few months, I shall be able to send you a check for five thousand dollars."

"One likes best the donations that entail sacrifice," his sister returned with dignity.

II

"Of course, in a way I'm as much of a fanatic as my son and daughter. But then, I'm eighty years old and an octogenarian is always a bit insane about one thing or another." Mrs. Edgeworth, leaning heavily on the arm of Dennis, her stalwart English maid, was going the daily rounds of her magnificent house with young Gregory Sanborn.

Though the man was thirty-five, he was always called "young Sanborn," or "the boy that trails around after Mrs. Tom Edgeworth." He was slim and blond and rather bashful; certainly he didn't look his age. Besides, he had never learned to control his enthusiasms. Art and Mrs. Edgeworth—these were his altars of adoration.

His worship of the old woman and her treasures combined joyful exultation and downright awe. He knelt with rever-

ence at his shrines, but his eyes had at the same time an irrepressible beam of romantic ardour. Worshipper and knightly champion was Sanborn. He thought the sardonic, bedizened old woman the most wonderful creature that had ever been born; he would have obeyed any outlandish command from her. The two had been staunch friends for five years.

Mrs. Edgeworth had a complete knowledge of the ridicule that was dealt out to them in their queer intimacy. It didn't bother her in the least. She enjoyed the company of her "Sancho Panza," as she called Sanborn. With him she had a stimulating time; he was the only person who relished her every shaft of satire and therefore she found to her own satisfaction that her wit was at its sharpest when directed into his ears. He was a dear boy, and the fact that he let himself be overshadowed by her didn't harm him. Though he tried to be a painter, his success could never be more than a mediocre one. Hero worship was his true vocation. Mrs. Edgeworth had soon decided she had as substantial a claim to his devotion as anybody else. So she had allowed him to tag about after her whenever he liked.

They had paused to-day, as usual, beneath Titian's superb portrait of a Venetian nobleman.

"I hate to think, Gregory, that after I'm dead this fine old roué will be sold and that the proceeds will take a giggling crowd of Girl Scouts—members of the Easter-Lily or Tube-Rose troop—out into God's pure air. It isn't right, now is it?" she put it up to him.

Sanborn laughed heartily.

"No, he wasn't cut out to help poor girls," he admitted.

"But, you see, that will be his fate," she pressed. "All my wicked possessions will be put to some charitable end. Even my disreputable Leda over there will go at auction, and the price she fetches will buy gymnasium fixtures—dumbbells and Indian clubs—for the Young Men's Christian Association. And this house, Gregory! What's to become of this house? Will it be utilized as the Supreme Temple for the thirty-second degree members of the Girl Scouts?"

"Dear Mrs. Edgeworth," he returned with gravity, "rather than permit that sort of thing, you'd really better leave it to the City of New York."

"A public museum!" She shuddered. "That would be desecration, too. The solemn tramp of schoolmarms through my rooms would reach me in the tomb, Gregory. If the place weren't fireproof, I'd burn it down, make a funeral-pyre of it!"

She was silent for a moment.

Then, "Ah, well!" she sighed at length, "I'm abominably tired. When my legs shake under me at a time like this, it shows I'm going downhill at breakneck speed. Six months ago I could stand in front of that splendid fellow"—she waved her hand at Titian's grandee—"and not be aware that I *had* legs. Come along!" She poked her stolid maid into motion. "We'll have some tea, Gregory. I'll try to be less lugubrious."

By the time they reached the drawing room the old woman was gasping. She threw herself into her chair.

"I'll have to come to a decision soon, my dear fellow," she panted. "Every campaign my children go in for drives a bright new nail into my coffin. Rage is bad for octogenarians. I think, when I die, I'll have myself mummified and wrapped in gaudy cerements and sent around to my son's house for a souvenir."

She wagged her head in grim amusement.

Sanborn, with commendable tact, gave the conversation a veer.

"I lunched with some of the Metropolitan Museum crowd yesterday," he announced. "We agreed that the new Botticelli was the finest in the country. He never did a thing of more exquisite distinction. It has all the mastery of line, all the strange chilliness of the Uffizi Venus. And those few marvellous frost-bitten roses in the Virgin's hand!"

His eyes glowed with enthusiasm. The man's true character came out only when he was discussing some work of art that he loved.

"I can't explain the effect it has on me, you know. It—well," he gave a rather apologetic laugh at his clumsy attempt to put his state of mind into figurative speech, "it almost makes my lungs sting, the way an awfully cold winter day does. It rarefies the air, if you know what I'm trying to get at——"

"That's exactly it." The old woman nodded with decision and her haggard face took on a new animation. "It's

like a wind that's come over miles of dazzling snow. You've got *just* the quality of that picture, Gregory. Now the Gentle—that's so different. That's all joy and melting softness—a real Italian spring's in the air there——”

So they talked, eager, incoherent, fascinated. They groped with an intense earnestness for the proper words to express the elusive charm of this or that picture, and, at last tracking down the right phrase, pounced on it gleefully. In their intense excitement they drew closer together until in the end Mrs. Edgeworth was accompanying her statements with quick taps on the man's knee.

Then Mrs. Dent was announced.

Mrs. Edgeworth shrugged her shoulders impatiently and settled back in her great chair.

“Upon my word, Gregory,” she exclaimed, “I don't know what I should do without you! I should have been dead five years ago if you hadn't appeared on the scene.”

Charlotte, on the threshold, inclined her head in Sanborn's direction with sweet civility; she made it apparent, however, that her cordiality had been achieved only after a supreme effort. In the presence of an artist, Mrs. Dent always appeared a bit distrustful; it was as if she feared that men with such queer natures might at any moment take it into their heads to visit a lewd, Satyr-like embrace upon her. Holding herself very erect, she glided across the room to her mother and placed a tender kiss on her wrinkled and rouged left cheek.

“How do you do, Dennis?” Mrs. Dent believed that all menials adored her; she therefore made her greetings to them in a tone of humility—just to show them that she felt herself unworthy of being worshipped.

“May I have some tea?” she asked. “I am excessively tired. One determines to hoard one's strength at a time like this,” she remarked to her mother, “and then suddenly it's gone—one's forgotten one's staunch resolution.”

Polite as ever, she smiled at Sanborn.

“Don't train your batteries on Gregory,” Mrs. Edgeworth warned her. “He's got no money to give to your drive, Charlotte.”

Mrs. Dent brought her thin lips together disapprovingly and said nothing.

"What have you come for? It's not Wednesday, my child." The old woman was rude.

"I had something of importance to tell you." Mrs. Dent opened her lips for this statement, then closed them again with an air of finality.

"Indeed!" Mrs. Edgeworth showed intense interest. "Tell me at once, Charlotte. Don't keep me in this nerve-racking suspense. Poor Gregory is on tenter-hooks, too. So speak right up. Don't be shy."

Mrs. Dent's lifted eyebrows witnessed her dislike of sharing confidences with servants and artists. Sanborn got to his feet.

"Sit down, Gregory," Mrs. Edgeworth commanded, peremptorily. "If my daughter's news isn't fit for your ears, it's not fit for mine."

Charlotte coloured at this vulgar innuendo. She retained her matronly dignity, however, despite the old woman's malicious chuckle.

"Very well, Mother," she murmured. "It was my thought to spare *you*—that was all."

"Dear me!" Mrs. Edgeworth mused for a moment. Then, "*Don't* tell me, Charlotte, that you and the other Scout Mothers are planning to wear khaki breeches in future!" she cried.

Sanborn and Dennis exchanged surreptitious grins at this bit of shameless buffoonery.

Mrs. Dent drew herself up majestically.

"I didn't come here to listen to jokes, Mother," she murmured. "I haven't time for that sort of—er—relaxation."

"Forgive me!" the old woman begged. "We ancients do run on so. Even *you* will lose your deadly conciseness when you're eighty, my darling."

Charlotte cleared her throat in true public-platform style and her gaze, shifting from one to another of her audience, drew them to attention as deftly as the rap of a chairman's hammer.

"I ran in this afternoon," she elucidated, her eyes focused now on her mother, "to tell you of a little scheme that I worked out in my own head—a plot, I suppose, it might be called, to raise money for our drive."

Mrs. Edgeworth took advantage of her daughter's impressive pause to exclaim "Hear! Hear!" in a high treble.

Charlotte saw fit to ignore the derisive applause. She turned her attention squarely on Gregory Sanborn.

"The point is, Mr. Sanborn," she announced, "my mother was unable to contribute to the cause. She was rather strapped, to put it baldly. When one buys art treasures one is apt to find it difficult to aid charitable organizations."

"How true that is!" was the old woman's sly comment.

"Of course," Mrs. Dent forged ahead doggedly, "one realized that Mother would have *liked* to help. It was just an unfortunate mischance—her having purchased certain canvases at a certain time." Her tone was one of sorrowful indulgence for the aged culprit. "So I've sprung a little surprise!" This rather archly. "At three this afternoon a few of my friends gathered in my drawing room. Mr. Tomlinson Jones—a very fine man whose heart is in the Girl Scout movement—acted as master of ceremonies."

"And what has Mr. Tomlinson Jones got to do with *me*, pray?" Mrs. Edgeworth wanted to know.

"Ah, you'd never guess!" Charlotte was playfully mysterious.

"I don't care to guess," the old woman snapped. "Do get on with your story, Charlotte."

Mrs. Dent looked hurt.

"Thanks to Mr. Jones, Mother," she said with a touch of asperity, "we have put you on our list as donating five thousand dollars to the Girl Scouts of America."

Mrs. Edgeworth threw up her hands in mock horror.

"Perfidy!" she cried. "Sheer perfidy!"

"In my drawing room there hung a certain canvas." Charlotte intoned the words, as if they composed the first line of a poem.

"*Hung!*" her mother interrupted. "I begin to see light."

"It was a canvas"—Mrs. Dent always called a painting a "canvas"—"that I never liked. From the start, I have considered it a most cruel caricature. To me, old age is a very beautiful thing." This last confession was directed at the bewildered Sanborn.

"To me, old age is a hideous joke!" Mrs. Edgeworth protested venomously. "Don't look so thunderstruck, Gregory. My daughter is speaking of John Sargent's portrait of me, that masterpiece of unblushing realism."

"As you wish!" Mrs. Dent was polite. "Our opinions differ. I consider it an insult. Every time I have looked at it it has made me unhappy. I could stand it no *longer*. Mr. Jones auctioned it off for me to-day. It was bought by Mrs. Petherby; I believe she plans to place it in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. But the main point is that the five thousand dollars has been entered as *your* very generous donation, Mother."

"Upon my word, Charlotte, I congratulate you!" Mrs. Edgeworth flung herself back in her chair and burst into uncontrollable merriment. "It's the first time in your life you've ever done anything I could genuinely admire you for. But this was bold, this was admirable, this was *heroic*! You've played a magnificent joke on me, my child. It was worthy of *me* at my most diabolical, I swear!"

Charlotte, during this outburst, had risen with dignity to her feet.

"Please, Mother!" she protested with great distinctness; apparently she felt that she was dealing with a fit of hysteria.

Bending over, she stroked one of the old woman's hands. "It was not my idea to play a joke on you, *believe* me. I thought my little surprise would delight you. If I have hurt you—ah, I am *sorry*."

"But you haven't hurt me; you've tickled me to death," the old woman blithely assured her. "Here am I, hoist with my own petard into the front ranks of the Scout contributors. John Sargent and I! Good Lord, I take off my hat to you, my child!"

"You're quite all right? You're sure you're quite all right?" Mrs. Dent's voice was vibrant with emotion.

"Of course—don't be a goose and spoil your pretty trick." Her mother was sharp. "Now do run off to your next lecture, Charlotte. I've something I want to say to Gregory."

After Mrs. Dent had glided from the room, Mrs. Edgeworth fixed Sanborn with a bright, piercing glance. She nodded her head at him wisely three or four times.

Then she announced:

"You see, Gregory! Didn't I tell you how it would be? The battle has begun—righteousness against beauty. Draw up your chair, my dear fellow, while I tell you *my* nefarious

scheme. Leave the room, Dennis! You seem an honourable old thing, but you're human, after all, and these Scout Mothers wouldn't be above bribing you——"

III

The following Wednesday, Mrs. Edgeworth, supported on one side by the dauntless Dennis and on the other by an old and trusted manservant, emerged from the train at the Williamstown railroad station. She was tremulous and gaspingly out of breath, but her black eyes twinkled with amusement.

"Ah, there you are, my dear fellow!" She pushed her attendants away with her elbows and held out both hands to Gregory Sanborn, who had just hurried along the platform to her side. "You're proving yourself the *great* martyr for the cause of beauty." She examined him shrewdly. "But you do show the strain; you look absurdly worn." She gave a dry chuckle of satisfaction. "What a sell on us it would have been if I'd dropped dead in the train!"

Sanborn's polite smile was a trifle strained. "I have the motor here," he murmured.

"You haven't neglected a single necessary vulgarity?" she asked. "You've done everything in the proper style?"

He nodded.

"Everything is according to the story-books," he told her.

Mrs. Edgeworth patted his sleeve in offhand friendliness.

"Poor boy!" she exclaimed. "It's a tragic moment for you—I know that. Thank God, I'm old enough and coarse enough to take it as a lark. But you won't be under a cloud for long, Gregory. Why, two years from now people will have forgotten that I ever existed."

"You're tired, Mrs. Edgeworth—and there's a damnable chill in the air here!" Sanborn's voice had lost its furtive, guilty note and his face had brightened. There was no question about it—the old woman had a tonic quality. "Let's get into the motor."

"Let's get the whole dreadful business over with, you mean!" she contradicted him. "I must be in bed by seven, Dennis tells me, with piles of hot-water bottles dotted about

my person. Does that strike you as in accordance with the story-books, Gregory?"

She shrugged.

"Well, it's a grim little adventure, no one can deny that," she commented. "A funeral couldn't have less rosy tints."

She grasped his arm and beckoned Dennis to her.

"But there's no point in hastening my end by catching cold in this miserable station," she exclaimed. "Come ahead!"

In the motor, Mrs. Edgeworth put her head on her maid's shoulder.

"How long a drive is it?" she asked Sanborn.

"Two hours," he returned.

"Very well, I shall nap a while," she mumbled, and in a few moments was asleep.

"The sheer barbarity of it! What one's children will drive one to!" Mrs. Edgeworth was dragging her stiff old legs up the porch steps of a dingy little cottage in a Vermont town. Sanborn had a firm grip of her arm. Behind them walked in gloomy silence Dennis and the manservant.

"You've warned this long-suffering divine what to expect, Gregory?" the old woman asked. "If not, we'd better have restoratives ready."

Sanborn achieved a rueful smile.

"I've told him the truth, Mrs. Edgeworth," he returned.

"That's—fortunate," she panted.

Suddenly she burst out laughing and nodded in the direction of the servants.

"Dennis and Parker are about to break into three rousing cheers, I believe!" she cried. "Ah—the door is opening. The heroine entered the parsonage on the arm of her great-grandson. Upon my word, the vulgarity of this business is almost too much for *me*! As for you, poor boy——"

IV

They were sitting, the newly married pair, in front of the open fire in their drawing room at the Vermont Inn. Dennis and Parker had been sent off to celebrate "the nuptial wake," as their mistress humorously dubbed it. The old woman was leaning back in her chair. She was very weary,

now the business was settled, and made no effort to combat the fit of yawning that had her in its grip; but she still could chuckle sardonically at the grim farce they had enacted and her eyes had a merry snap.

"Now, then, Gregory!" she told the man. "It was very sweet of you to leave all the actual sordid financial details to me. I brought a copy of the new will along with me—just to prove I didn't betray the trust."

She fumbled about in the bag she always carried and located the document.

"There, my dear fellow." She pointed out a clause with a gnarled forefinger. "You see, my New York house and all it contains go to you, with sufficient income to keep the place going. Everything else will be my children's. They've no cause for complaint. I have a disgraceful lot of money, you know. Thomas and Charlotte can contribute in most orgiastic fashion to their drives and things. But my treasure—my *real* children—are yours by right of your exquisite martyrdom."

"But, my dear Mrs. Edgeworth!" the man burst out.

"Mrs. Sanborn, if you please," she contradicted him with a wag of her head.

He laughed, but made no attempt to incorporate the correction into his discourse. "I—I honestly wish you wouldn't call this business my 'martyrdom.' As a matter of fact, you are the best friend I've ever had. I'm *glad* to have done this for you. I haven't a single regret as to the actual—er—arrangement; it was only the method that rather—well, *hurt*, if you know what I mean."

"Ah—I understand perfectly, *perfectly*," she assured him. "But we couldn't go at it in decent fashion. My children wouldn't have been properly stumped unless we'd made romantic fools of ourselves. But it will all blow over soon enough—and there you'll be, with Titians and Giorgiones and Botticellis to soothe your poor wounded sensibilities. The method was unavoidable, granted my dreadful off-spring——"

She was silent for a moment.

Then, sitting up quite straight of a sudden, she announced:

"*Mind*, Gregory, your responsibility isn't over at my death. You've got to marry again with all speed and have

children of your own. We've done this abominable deed in order to safeguard my collection—and not for one paltry generation, either. You must promise me to fall in love with some kindred spirit and do your duty by posterity. And before I die I'll coach you how *not* to bring up children; I'll set my Charlotte and Thomas up before you as deplorable warnings. But, good Lord!" she sighed. "I have an idea that, when I get to Heaven, I shall have to begin at once fighting celestial Girl Scout movements and empyrean Y. M. C. A. drives. God will never let me have peace after this blasphemous marriage. So, when I look down over my gold bar, at least let me hear your infants lisping of the glories of the Quattrocento in Sienna and such-like academic matters."

"To tell the truth, dear Mrs. Edgeworth," Sanborn murmured with a timid laugh, "the—the woman's already picked. She's with us in our plot. She'll wait for me, though I can't understand what she sees in *me*, if you get what I mean——"

"Ah—I'm *overjoyed*!" The old woman leaned forward and patted him on the arm. "That simplifies things at once. Now I can die in peace."

After a moment she remarked:

"My old bones tell me it's nearly seven, Gregory. Dennis will be here soon. I want you to send off a wire to Charlotte. It's Wednesday, so address it to my house. She and Thomas will be reporting there for dinner. And lay it on thick, poor boy! Elopement, drive in dusk to quaint old parsonage, ecstatic happiness in the dear little inn, etc., etc. They've got to be fed a bitter dose. They mustn't think our motives are anything but disgracefully amatory. We're not to give them a loophole for pity. And you'll despatch the sentimental tidings to the New York papers also—and be sure you *do* make the messages sentimental. Our noble purpose we shall keep to ourselves. If Charlotte guessed the truth, she might weep over us in our pitiful damnation. Heavens, should she scent out a 'cause' she'd be unbearable. In that case, we might just as well have spared ourselves this jaunt and got the matter off our minds in New York."

There came a knock at the door.

"Dennis and the hot-water bottles!" the old woman announced. "The story-book details are finished. Good-night, Gregory. You *are* a dear boy——"

TACT

By THOMAS BEER

From Saturday Evening Post

YOU make me sick," said Mrs. Egg. She spoke with force. Her three daughters murmured, "Why, Mamma!" A squirrel ran up the trunk of an apple tree that shaded the veranda; a farm hand turned from weeding the mint bed by the garage. Mrs. Egg didn't care. Her chins shook fiercely. She ate a wafer, emptied her glass of iced tea, and spread her little hands with their buried rings on the table.

"You make me sick, girls," she said. "Dammy's been home out of the Navy precisely seven weeks an' two days, an' a hour hasn't passed but what one of you've been phonin' me from town about what he has or ain't done unbecomin' to a boy that's engaged to Edith Sims! I don't know why you girls expect a boy that was champion heavy-weight wrestler of the Atlantic Fleet an' stands six foot four and a half inches in his bare feet to get all thrilled over bein' engaged. A person that was four years in the Navy an' went as far as Japan has pretty naturally been in love before, and——"

"Mamma!"

Mrs. Egg ate another sugar wafer and continued relentlessly in her soft drawl "—ain't likely to get all worked up over bein' engaged to a sixteen-year-old girl who can't cook any better than a Cuban on his own say-so. As for those spiced guavas he sent home from Cuba in March," she mused, "I thought they were fierce. As for his takin' Edith Sims out drivin' in his overalls and a shirt, Adam John Egg is the best-lookin' person in this family and you know it. You three girls are the sent'mentalest women in the state of Ohio and I don't know how your husbands stand it. My gee! D'you expect Dammy to chase this girl around heavin' roses

at her like a fool in a movie?" She panted and peered into the iced-tea pitcher. Emotion made her thirsty. Mrs. Egg aimed an affable bawl at the kitchen door and called, "Benjamina! I'd be awful obliged if you'd make up some more iced tea, please. Dammy'll be through pickin' peaches soon and he's usually thirsty about four o'clock."

Her new cook nodded and came down the long veranda. The daughters stared civilly at this red-haired girl, taller than their tall selves. Benjamina lifted the vacant pitcher and carried it silently away. Her slim height vanished into the kitchen and the oldest daughter whispered, "Mercy, Mamma, she's almost as tall as Dammy!"

"She's just six feet," said Mrs. Egg with deliberate clarity meant to reach Benjamina; "but extremely graceful, I think. My gee! It's perfectly embarrassin' to ask a girl as refined as that to clear the table or dust. She went through high school in Cleveland and can read all the French in the cook-book exactly as if it made sense. It's a pleasure to have such a person in the house."

The second daughter leaned forward and said, "Mamma, that's another thing! I do think it's pretty—untactful of Dammy to take this girl's brother around in the car and introduce him to Edith Sims and her folks as if——"

"I think it was extremely sensible," Mrs. Egg puffed. "Hamish is a very int'restin' boy, and has picked up milkin' remarkably when he's only been here a week, and Dammy's taught him to sem'phore, or whatever that wiggling-your-arms thing is called. And he appreciates Dammy a lot." The plate of sugar wafers was stripped to bare crumbs. Mrs. Egg turned her flushed face and addressed the unseen: "Benjamina, you might bring some more cookies when the tea's ready, and some of those cup cakes you made this mornin'. Dammy ate five of them at lunch."

Benjamina answered "Yes, Mrs. Egg," in her slow fashion.

"Mamma," said the youngest daughter, "it's all right for you to say that Dammy is absolutely perfect, but the Simses are the most refined people in town, and it does look disgraceful for Dammy not to dress up a little when he goes there, and he's got all those beautiful tailor-made clothes from New York."

Mrs. Egg patiently drawled, "Fern, that's an awful

uninterestin' remark. Dammy looks exactly like a seal in a aquarium when he's dressed up, his things fit so smooth; but a boy that was four years in the Navy and helps milk a hundred and twenty-seven cows twice a day, besides mendin' all the machinery on the place, is *not* called upon to dress up evenings to go see a girl he's known all his life. He's twenty-one years and nine weeks old, an' capable of managin' his own concerns. . . . Thank you, Benjamina," she told the red-haired girl as the fresh pitcher clinked on the table and the cup cakes gleamed in yellow charm beside it. "I do hate to trouble you on such a hot day."

Benjamina smiled nicely and withdrew. Mrs. Egg ate one of the cup cakes and thought it admirable. She broke out, "My gee! There's another thing! You girls keep actin' as if Dammy wasn't as smart as should be! On the other hand, he drove up to Cleveland and looked at the list of persons willin' to work in the country and didn't waste time askin' the agency questions, but went round to Benjamina's flat and ate some choc'late cake. Then he loaded her and Hamish into the car and brought 'em down, all between six in the mornin' and twelve at night. I've had eight days of rest an' comfort for a result. . . . My gee! Your papa's the second biggest dairyman in this state, but that don't keep me in intell'gent cooks!"

The three young matrons sighed. Mrs. Egg considered them for a moment over her glass, and sniffed, "Mercy! This has been a pleasant afternoon!"

"Mamma," said the first-born, "you can't very well deny that Dammy's awful careless for an engaged man. He ought to've got a ring for Edith Sims when he was home at Christmas and the engagement came off. And——"

Mrs. Egg lost patience. She exclaimed, "Golden Jerusalem! Dammy got engaged at Judge Randolph's party the night before he went back to Brooklyn to his ship! My gee! I never heard such idiotic nonsense! You girls act as if Edith Sims—whose ears are much too big even if she does dress her hair low—was too good for Adam Egg! She's a nice child, an' her folks are nice and all the rest of it! . . . Dammy," she panted as the marvel appeared, "here's your sisters!"

Adam came up the long veranda with a clothes basket of peaches on his right shoulder. He nodded his black head

to his sisters and put the basket noiselessly down. Then he blew smoke from both nostrils of his bronze, small nose and rubbed its bridge with the cigarette. He seldom spoke. Mrs. Egg swiftly filled a glass with iced tea and Adam began to absorb this pensively. His sisters cooed and his mother somewhat forgave them. They had sense enough to adore Adam, anyhow. In hours of resolute criticism Mrs. Egg sometimes admitted that Adam's nose was too short. He was otherwise beyond praise. His naked dark shoulders rippled and convulsed as he stooped to gather three cup cakes. A stained undershirt hid some of his terrific chest and his canvas trousers hung beltless on his narrow hips. Mrs. Egg secretly hoped that he would change these garments before he went to call on his betrothed. The three cup cakes departed through his scarlet, wide mouth into his insatiable system of muscles, and Adam lit his next cigarette. Smoke surged in a tide about his immovable big eyes. He looked at the road beyond the apple trees, then swung and made swift, enigmatic gestures with his awesome arms to young Hamish Saunders, loitering by the garage. The valuable Hamish responded with more flappings of his lesser arms and trotted down the grass. The letter carrier approached the delivery box at the gates of the monstrous farm.

"What did you sem'phore to Hamish, lamb?" Mrs. Egg asked.

Adam said "Mail" and sat down on the floor.

He fixed a black stare on the pitcher and Mrs. Egg filled his glass. Muscles rose in ovals and ropes under the hairless polish of his arm as he took the frail tumbler. His hard throat stirred fleetly and his short feet wriggled in moccasins of some soiled, soft leather, indicating satisfaction. Mrs. Egg sighed. Benjamina made tea perfectly. She must tactfully tell the girl that Adam liked it. No female could hear that fact without a thrill.

"Package for you," said young Hamish, bounding up the steps. He gave Adam a stamped square box, announced "I signed for it," and retired shyly from the guests to read a post card. He was a burly lad of sixteen, in a shabby darned jersey and some outgrown breeches of Adam's. Mrs. Egg approved of him; he appreciated Adam.

The marvel tore the box to pieces with his lean fingers and

extracted a flat case of velvet. Two rings glittered in its satin lining. Adam contemplated the diamond of the engagement ring and the band of gold set with tiny brilliants which would forever nail Edith Sims to his perfections. His sisters squealed happily. Mrs. Egg thought how many pounds of Egg's At Butter were here consumed in vainglory and sighed gently.

She drawled, "My gee, Dammy! Nobody can poss'bly say you ain't got good taste in jewellery, anyhow," and shot a stare of fierce pride at her daughters. They rose. She knew that the arrival of these gauds would be known in Ilium forthwith. She said "Well, good evenin', girls," and accepted their kisses affably.

Adam paid no attention to the going of the oldest daughter's motor car; he was staring at the rings, and the blank brown of his forehead was disturbed by some superb and majestic fancy current under the dense smoothness of his jet hair. Hamish Saunders came shyly to peep at the gems and stooped his curly red head. The boy had large gray eyes, like those of his sister, and her hawk nose, which Mrs. Egg thought patrician.

She said, "Hamish, you ain't had any tea yet, lamb. Dammy's left some. Benjamina puts in exactly sugar enough, an' I never heard of mint in iced tea before. It's awful interestin'."

Hamish soberly drank some tea and asked Adam, "Want the motor bike, Mr. Egg?"

Adam nodded. The boy went leaping down the flagged walk to the garage and busily led Adam's red motorcycle back to the veranda steps. Then he gazed with reverence at Adam's shoulders, felt his right biceps, and sadly walked off toward the barns. The herd of the Egg Dairy Company was an agitation of twinkling horns and multicoloured hides in the white-fenced yard. The ten hired men were sponging their hands at the model washstand by the colossal water tower's engine house. Mrs. Egg ate the last cup cake and looked off at the town of Ilium, spread in a lizard of trees at the top of a long slope. The motor containing her female offspring was sliding into the main street. The daughters would stop at the Sims house to tell the refined Edith that her engagement ring had come.

Mrs. Egg pursed her lips courageously and said, "Dammy, you might change your duds, dear, before you take Edith her sol'taire. It's a kind of a formal occasion, sort of."

The giant pronounced lazily the one syllable "Bunk," and turned his face toward his mother. Then he said, "You've got awful pretty hands, Mamma."

"Mercy, Dammy," Mrs. Egg panted, flushing. Her prodigiousness shook in the special chair of oak under the blow of this compliment. She tittered, "Well, your papa—I do hope it ain't so hot in Chicago—used to say so before I got stout."

Adam blew a snake of smoke from his left nostril and surprised her with a whole sentence. He drawled, "Was a oiler on the Nevada that sung a song about pale hands, pink tipped like some kind of a flower, Mamma."

"My gee," said Mrs. Egg, "I know that scng! A person sang it at the Presbyterian supper in 1910 when the oysters were bad, and some people thought it wasn't correct for a church party, bein' a pretty passionate kind of song. It was awful popular for a while after that . . . Benjamina would know, her papa havin' kept a music store. I'll ask her. Help me up, lamb."

Adam arose and took his mother kindly out of her chair with one motion. Mrs. Egg passed voluminously over the sill into the kitchen and addressed her superior cook, beaming at the girl.

"There's a sent'mental kind of song that Dammy's interested in which is about some gump lovin' a woman's pale hands beside the shallow Marne or some such place."

Benjamina brushed back her blazing hair with both slender hands and looked at the rosy nails.

She said, "Pale Hands. I think—— No, it's the Kashmir love song. It used to be sung a great deal."

Adam said "Thanks" in the doorway.

Then he turned, jamming the jewel case into his pocket, and lounged down the steps. His shoulders gleamed like oiled wood. He picked a handful of peaches from the basket, which would have burdened two mortals, and split one in his terrible fingers. He ate a peach absently and threw the red stone at a roaming chicken, infamously busy in the nas-

turtiums. Mrs. Egg leaned on the side of the door. A slight nervousness made her reach for the radishes which Benjamina was cleaning. Radishes always stimulated Mrs. Egg. She ate two and hoped that Edith Sims wouldn't happen to look at Adam's back. The undershirt revealed both shoulder blades and most of the sentiment "Damn Kaiser Bill" tattooed in pink across Adam. It seemed indecorous at the moment of betrothal, and Mrs. Egg winced.

Then she wondered. Adam took another peach and pressed it in a cupped hand. Its blood welled over his shoulder and smeared the rear of the shirt brilliantly. He scrubbed it thoroughly into the back of his cropped hair and massaged his flat abdomen with a second fruit. After some study he kicked his feet out of the moccasins and doubled down in his fluid manner to rub his insteps with black grease from the valves of the waiting motorcycle. Then he signalled his contentment with these acts by a prolonged exhalation of smoke from his mouth, gave his mother an inscrutable glance as he tucked the cast moccasins into the fork of the apple tree and fled down the driveway with a coughing of his machine's engine, barefoot, unspeakably soiled and magnificently shimmering with peach blood.

"My gee!" said Mrs. Egg.

Benjamina looked up from the radishes and asked "What did you say?" gravely.

So Mrs. Egg meditated, eating a radish, on the simple pleasure of talking to the admirable girl about this spectacle. Adam had favoured Benjamina with some notice in these ten days, and his approval of her cooking was silently manifest. He had even eaten some veal goulash, a dish which he usually declined. The girl was a lady, anyhow. Mrs. Egg exploded.

"Benjamina, Dammy's up to somethin'! His sisters keep tellin' me he ain't tactful, either! My gee! He simply washed himself in peach juice and went off to give Edith Sims her engagement ring! And left his moc'sins in the apple tree where he always used to put his cigarettes when his papa didn't think he was old enough to smoke. But heaven knows, I can't see that anything ever hurt Dammy! He's always been the neatest boy that ever lived, and had all his clothes made when he was in the Navy. It's perfectly true that he ain't dressed respectable once since he got home.

Mercy, the other day he went in to see Edith in a half a khaki shirt that he'd been usin' to clean the garage floor with!"

Benamina pared a radish with a flutter of her white fingers and asked, "How long have they been engaged, Mrs. Egg?"

"He had ten days' liberty at Christmas and was home. It perfectly upset me, because Dammy hadn't ever paid any attention to the child. They got engaged at a dance Judge Randolph gave. It was extremely sudden," Mrs. Egg pondered, "although the Simses are very refined folks and Edith's a nice girl. . . . A boy who was four years in the Navy naturally ought to know when he's in love or not. But men do fall in love in the most accidental manner, Benamina! They don't seem to have any intentions of it. My gee! A man who takes to runnin' after a girl for her money is within my comprehensions, or because she's good-lookin'. But what most men marry most women for is beyond me. I'm forty-six years of age," she said, "but I still get surprised at things. I think I'll lie down. . . . Do you man'cure your nails, or are they as pink as that all the time?"

"They're naturally pink," Benamina smiled.

"They're awful pretty," Mrs. Egg yawned, pausing in her advance to the door of the living room. Then it seemed guileful to increase this praise. She added "Dammy was sayin' so," and strolled into the living room, where twenty-five photographs of Adam reposed on shelves and tables.

She closed the door and stopped to eat a peppermint from the glass urn beside the phonograph's cabinet. Excitements worked in her. She brushed a fly from the picture of Adam in wrestling tights and sank on a vast couch. The leather cushions hissed, breathing out air under her descent. She closed her eyes and brooded. . . . If Adam wanted to annoy Edith Sims, he had chosen a means cleverly. The girl was elaborate as to dress and rather haughty about clothes. She had praised the attire of Judge Randolph's second son before Adam pointedly on Sunday at tea in the veranda. Perturbations and guesses clattered in Mrs. Egg's mind. Then a real clatter in the kitchen roused her.

"I milked three cows," said Hamish Saunders to his sister in a loud and complacent voice.

Benamina said less loudly but with vigour, "Hamish, you got a post card! I saw you reading it! I told you not to write any one where we'd gone to. Now——"

Mrs. Egg knew that the boy was wiggling. He said, "Oh, I wrote Tick Matthews. He won't tell Cousin Joe, Benjy."

"He'll tell his mother and she'll tell everyone in the building! I didn't want any one to know where we'd gone to!"

Mrs. Egg sat up. In a little, the lad spoke with a sound of male determination. He spoke airily. His hands must be jammed into his pockets. He said, "Now Cousin Joe ain't going to come runnin' down here after us, Benjy. You've gone off, so that ought to sort of show him you ain't going to marry him. I was asking Adam if there's any law that a person's guardian can make 'em live with him if they don't want to——"

"You told him!"

"I did not!"

The girl said, "Don't talk so loud, Hamish! Mrs. Egg's taking a nap upstairs. You told him!"

"I didn't tell him a thing! I said there was a guy I knew that had run off from his guardian and——"

Benamina burst into queer, vexed laughter. She said, "You might as well have told him! The day he came to the flat he asked who else lived there besides us. Cousin Joe's pipes were all over the place. It——"

"Look here! There's a judge in this town, and Mrs. Egg or Adam would tell him we're not children or imbeciles or nothin'! If Cousin Joe came down here lookin' for us——" Presently he said with misery on each syllable, "Don't cry, Benjy. . . . But nothin'll happen. . . . Anyhow, you'll be twenty-one in October and the court'll give you our income, 'stead of payin' it to Cousin Joe. . . . Bet you a dollar it's more than he says it is!" He whistled seven notes of a bugle call and then whimpered, "Quit cryin', Benjy!"

"F-finish these radishes," Benamina commanded; "I want to go brush my hair."

There was the light sound of her rubber soles on the back stairs. Mrs. Egg lay down again, wishing that the urn of

peppermints was within reach. In the kitchen Hamish said "Aw, hell!" and the chair by the table creaked as he slumped into it. He would pare radishes very badly in that mood, Mrs. Egg thought.

She now thought of Benjamina with admiration. Adam had seen the girl's name on a list of women willing to take service in the country, at a Cleveland agency. He had gone to interview Benjamina, Mrs. Egg gathered, because a cook on the U. S. S. *Nevada* had been named Saunders and the word looked auspicious. Accident, said Mrs. Egg to herself, was the dominant principle of life. She was much interested. Benjamina had taken proper steps to get away from an unpleasant guardian and should be shielded from any consequences. Certainly a girl who could cook to satisfy Adam wasn't to be given back to some nameless male in Cleveland, in a flat. Mrs. Egg abhorred flats. A man who would coop two children in a flat deserved no pity or consideration. And Adam required gallons of peach butter for winter use. Mrs. Egg arose, stalked openly into the kitchen, and addressed Hamish as an equal. She said, "Bub, you're an awful tactful boy, and have sense. Dammy said so himself. Honesty is my policy, an' I may as well say that I could hear all you were talkin' with Benjamina right now. . . . Who is this Cousin Joe you've run off from?"

Hamish cut a radish in two and wretchedly stammered, "H-he's dad's cousin. He's a louse!"

Mrs. Egg drawled, "My gee! That's a awful good description of your relation! Now, I haven't any intention to lose Benjamina when she's the best cook I ever had, an' you're not as bad at milkin' as you might be. If this person comes down here or makes any fuss I'll see to it that he don't get anywheres. So if Benjamina gets frightened you tell her that I'm goin' to look after this."

"Yes'm," said Hamish.

He looked at Mrs. Egg with an amazed awe that was soothing. She beamed and strolled out of the kitchen. Descending the steps one by one, she came to the level walk of the dooryard and marched along it toward the barns. Egg was taking a holiday with his sister, married to a dyspeptic clergyman in Chicago, and it was her duty to aid Adam by surveying the cows. She entered the barnyard and rounded

the corner of the cows' palace into a group of farm hands bent above a trotting of dice on the clay. Adam looked up from this sport and said "'Lo, Mamma," cheerfully.

"My gee," Mrs. Egg faltered, regarding a pile of silver before his knees, "I never saw you win a cent at any game before, Dammy!"

The giant grinned, cast the dice, and raked three dollars toward him. His eyes were black lights. He announced: "This is my lucky day, Mamma!" and all the worshipful youths chuckled as he stood up. He walked over a Swede's stooped back and dragged Mrs. Egg away from her husband's hirelings. Then he lit a cigarette and consumed half its length in an appalling suction. The smoke jetted from his nostrils in a flood. He patted Mrs. Egg's upper chin with a thumb and said, "She gave me the air, Mamma!"

"What?"

"She told me to fly my kite! She's off me! She's goin' to marry Jim Randolph. It's all flooie. . . . I'd like a tub of champagne an' five fried hens for supper! Mamma," said Adam, "I ain't engaged to that girl any more!" Therewith he took all the silver from his pocket and sent it whirling in a gay, chiming shower up the roof of the cow barn. His teeth flashed between his parted lips and dimples invaded his brown cheeks. He swung his arms restlessly and his mother thought that he would break into a dance. Adam reflected, "It's hell what happens by accident, Mamma. Was a bowl of punch in the lib'ry at that dance of Judge Randolph's Christmastime that'd knock the teeth out of a wildcat. Had six cups. Saw this girl's hand hangin' over the banisters when I was headin' for the front door. I kissed it. Mamma, there ain't any way of tellin' a nice girl that you don't mean anything when you kiss her. They don't understand it."

A devastating admiration of her child made Mrs. Egg's heart cavort. His manners were sublime. He lit another cigarette and stated, "Well, that's all of that." Then, wearied with much speech, he was still.

"Mercy, Dammy! This is an awful relief! Your sisters have been holdin' forth about Edith Sims bein' much more refined than God all afternoon. I was gettin' kind of scared of her. . . . What's that phonograph plate, lamb?"

Adam didn't answer, but ripped the envelope from the

grained disk, and Mrs. Egg saw, on the advertising, "Kashmiri Song." But her thoughts had sunk to a profound and cooling peace; there would be no more Edith Sims. She drawled, "Edith's pretty awful sedate, Dammy. I don't think she'd have the sand to run off from—a person she didn't like, or make her own livin'."

The giant flung up his arms and made certain gestures. Hamish Saunders came hurtling from the house for orders. Adam said, "Go get me some clothes, kid—white. And shoes'n a cake of soap. Then come swimmin'. Put this plate with the rest. Hustle!" He ground his nose with a fist, staring after the boy, then said, "Nice kid, Mamma."

"Mercy, yes, Dammy! Dammy, it's pretty ridiculous to have Benjamina and the boy eat in the kitchen, and it takes tact to keep a nice girl like that contented. I think they'd better take their meals with us, sweetheart."

He nodded and strode off among the regular files of apple and pear trees toward the aimless riverlet that watered the farm. Mrs. Egg felt hunger stir in her bulk. She plucked an apple leaf and chewed, marching up the walk, its fragrant pulp. Benjamina was soberly chopping the chickens for dinner into convenient bits.

Mrs. Egg applauded her performance, saying, "We'd better have 'em fried, I think. Dammy prefers it. And when you've got time you might go get one of those very big green bottles of pear cider down in the cellar, honey. It's awful explosive stuff and Hamish hadn't better drink any. And lay the table for four, because it's pretty lonely for Dammy eatin' with me steadily. . . . Edith Sims busted their engagement this afternoon, by the way, though it isn't at all important."

"Isn't it?"

Mrs. Egg refreshed herself with a bit of cracker from the table and drawled, "Not a bit, deary. I've never heard of anybody's heart breakin' under the age of thirty over a busted engagement. Dammy's pretty much relieved, though too polite to say so, and Edith'll marry Judge Randolph's second boy, who's a very nice kid and has curly hair, although his teeth stick out some. So it don't seem to matter except to my daughters, who'll want Dammy to go into full mourning and die of sorrow. They're tearful girls, but nice. Let me

show you how Dammy likes tomatoes fried when they're done with the chicken."

"Mrs. Egg," said Benjamina, "you're—a remarkable person." The slim, pale fingers twisted themselves against her dull blue frock into the likeness of a frightened white moth. She went on, "You—you never get excited."

"My gee! I haven't any patience with excitement, Benjamina. Things either go right or they go wrong. In either case, it's no good foam'n' at the mouth and tryin' to kick the roof off. I'm like Dammy. I prefer to be calm," said Mrs. Egg. "As for scatterin' rays of sunshine like a Sunday-school hymn, most people don't thank any one to do so—nor me, when I have indigestion."

"I—I feel much calmer since I've been here," Benjamina said. "It was so hot in the flat in Cleveland, and noisy. And it's very kind of you to ask Hamish and me to eat with you and Mr. Egg."

Her hands had become steadfast. She smiled a little.

"It'll be much more sociable, honey," Mrs. Egg reflected. "Even if Dammy don't talk, he likes company, havin' been in the Navy where he had lots. . . . Where's the biscuit flour? There's time to make some before supper."

The kitchen dimmed and Benjamina's tall body dulled into a restful shadow. She moved without noise and her pleasant voice was low. Mrs. Egg devised biscuits in comfort and smelled Adam's cigarettes in the living room. Hamish came to stimulate the making of this meal by getting his large feet in the way, and Mrs. Egg was scolding him tranquilly when the phonograph loosed a series of lazy notes. Then it sang, fervidly, of pale hands that it had loved beside some strange name.

"It's that Kashmir business," said Mrs. Egg. "Open the door, bub, so's we can hear."

The music swelled as the door opened and a circle of smoke eddied into the kitchen. Mrs. Egg saw Adam as a white pillar in the gloom. The machine sobbed "Where are you now? Where are you now?" with an oily sadness.

"Real touching," Mrs. Egg mentioned.

A crashing of the orchestra intervened. Then the voice cried, "Pale hands, pink tipped, like lotus flowers that——" The words jumbled into sounds. Mrs. Egg hungrily yawned.

The tenor wailed, "I would have rather felt you on my throat, crushing out life, than waving me farewell!" and the girl stirred beside the doorway, her hands in motion. The song expired with a thin noise of violins. Adam stopped the plate. An inexplicable silence filled the house, as if this stale old melody had wakened something that listened. Then Adam lit a cigarette.

"Supper near ready, Mamma?"

"Pretty near, lamb," said Mrs. Egg.

Supper was pleasant. Hamish talked buoyantly of cows. He was impressed by their stupidity and their artless qualities. Benjamina gazed at the four candles with gray eyes and smiled at nothing. Adam ate fourteen hot biscuits and three mounds of an ice cream that held fresh raspberries. He stared at the ceiling gravely, and his white shirt tightened as he breathed out the first smoke above a cup of coffee.

Then he said, "We'll go to the movies. Get your hat, Miss Saunders."

"But the dishes aren't washed!" Benjamina exclaimed.

"The kid and I'll wash 'em," Adam vouchsafed.

Mrs. Egg yawned, "Go ahead, Benjamina," and watched the girl's hands flutter as she left the green dining room.

Adam blew a ring of smoke, which drooped, dissolving about a candle. He reached across the table for the coffeepot and filled his cup, then looked at Hamish.

"What's she scared of, kid?"

"Cousin Joe," said Hamish presently. "He's—our guardian—wants to marry her. Y'see, we have some money from dad's store. Cousin Joe's a lawyer and the bank pays him the money."

"Lived with him in Cleveland?"

Hamish groaned, "You saw where we lived! Benjy couldn't keep the place lookin' decent. He knocke' his pipe out wherever he sat. But Benjy'll be twenty-one in October and the bank'll pay her the money."

"An' this Joe's a sour plum?"

"Well," said Hamish, with the manner of last justice, "he can sing pretty well."

Mrs. Egg was thinking of bed at ten o'clock when the telephone rang and the anguished voice of her youngest daughter came pouring from Ilium:

"Mamma! Dammy's got that girl in a box at the movies!"

"I'm glad," said Mrs. Egg, "that they're sitting in a box. My gee! It's hot as I ever felt it for this time of year, Fern! Benamina's such a large person that she——"

"Oh, Mamma! And it's all over town that Edith Sims is going to marry——"

"I can't pretend that I'm either surprised or sorry, Fern. As for Dammy marryin' a girl he would have to stoop over a yard to kiss after breakfast, it never seemed a just kind of arrangement to me, although I didn't want to criticize her. The Simses are nice folks—awful refined. Mercy, but don't Dammy look well in white pants?"

"Mamma! You simply haven't any heart!"

"I'll be forty-seven in December, Fern," said Mrs. Egg. "Good-night."

She drowsily ascended to her cool bedroom, where a vacuum flask of iced lemonade stood with a package of oatmeal crackers on the bedside table. In the dark she lay listening to the obliging wind that now moved in the ten acres of orchard, and sometimes she chuckled, nibbling a cracker. Finally she slept, and was wakened by Adam's voice.

"Was it a nice picture, Dammy?"

"Fair. Where's that law dictionary Dad got last year, Mamma?"

"It's in the pantry, under the paraffin for the preserves, sweetheart."

"Thanks," said Adam, and his feet went softly away.

Mrs. Egg resumed her slumbers composedly, and woke on the first clash of milk pails in the barnyard. Day was clear. Adam could get in the rest of the peaches and paint the garage roof without discomfort. She ate a cracker, dressing, and went down the back stairs to find Benamina grinding coffee in a white, fresh gown that showed gentle colour in her cheeks.

"Mercy," said Mrs. Egg, "but you're up real early!"

"I don't think it can be very healthy for Mr. Egg and Hamish to wait so long for breakfast," the girl said.

"The men's cook down at the bunk house always has coffee for Dammy. It's a sad time that Dammy can't get himself a meal around here, honey. But it's nice to have breakfast early. I think he's hungriest in the mornin'."

"Isn't he always hungry?"

"Always," Mrs. Egg assured her happily, beginning to pare chilled peaches; "and he likes your oatmeal, I notice. Bein' Scotch by descent, you understand the stuff. You've been here ten days, and it's remarkable how you've learned what Dammy likes. If he was talkative it wouldn't take so much intelligence. A very good way is to watch his toes. If they move he likes what he's eatin'. My gee! It was easy to tell when he was little and went barefooted. He's too tactful to complain about anything."

"He said, driving down from Cleveland, that he hated talking much," Benamina murmured.

Adam's black head showed above his blue milking shirt in the barnyard. Mrs. Egg watched the tall girl's gray eyes quicken as she gazed down the wet grass. Morning mist fairly smoked from the turf and the boles of apple trees were moist. Hamish was lugging pails to the dairy valiantly.

"The high school here," said Mrs. Egg, "is very good for the size of the town, and Hamish will be perfectly comfortable in winters. You mustn't be alarmed by my husband when he comes back from Chicago. It's a nervous habit he has of winkin' his left eye. It don't mean a thing. I'm tryin' to get hold of some girl that's reasonably intell'gent to do waitin' on table and dusting, which is not good for your hands."

"It's very nice here," Benamina said, still looking at the barnyard.

Mrs. Egg decided that she was a beautiful creature. Her colour improved breath by breath, and her face had the look of a goddess on a coin. The vast woman ate a peach and inspected this virgin hopefully. Then the pale hands shot to Benamina's throat and she whirled from the window. Hamish tumbled through the door, his shoes smeared with milk and his mouth dragged into a gash of fright.

He gulped, "It's Cousin Joe! He's gettin' out of a buggy at the gate!"

"Gracious!" said Mrs. Egg.

She rose and walked into the veranda, smoothing her hair. The man limping up from the white gates was tall and his shoulders seemed broad. He leaned on a cane. He wore a hat made of rough rings of straw. Mrs. Egg greatly disliked him at once, and went down the steps slowly, side-

ways. Adam was lounging up from the barnyard and some farm hands followed him in a clump of tanned faces. The light made their eyes flash. The woman sighed. There might be a deal of angry talk before she got rid of the lame person in black. He advanced, and she awaited him under the apple tree below the steps. When he approached she saw that his hair was dull brown and sleek as he took off his hat.

"Mrs. Egg?"

"I am," said Mrs. Egg.

The man smoothly bowed. He was less than six feet tall, but burly and not pale. His mouth smiled charmingly. He glanced at Adam, smoking on the steps, and twirled the cane in his hand. He said, "My name's Hume. I'm an attorney. I'm the guardian of Benjamina and Hamish Saunders, my cousin's children. They're here, I understand?"

"I understand," Mrs. Egg drawled, "that you ain't much of a guardian, and they're better off here."

Adam's voice came over her shoulder, "They're goin' to stay here."

Cold sweat rose in Mrs. Egg's clenched hands. She turned and saw Adam's nostrils rigid, yellow on his bronze face. She said, "Go in to breakfast, Dammy. I'm talkin' to this person."

Adam might lose his temper. He must go away. She looked at him for a moment, and the farm hands made new shadows on the turf, approaching curiously. Then Adam turned and walked into the kitchen.

"We're wasting time," the man observed, always smoothly. "Benjy's my ward and she's going back to Cleveland with me."

"I don't see as that follows, precisely," Mrs. Egg panted.

"The nearest justice would."

"Then you'd better get the nearest justice to say it," said Mrs. Egg, "because Benjamina's perfectly well off here. As for sendin' her back to Cleveland for you to make love at in a flat—my gee!"

She felt herself impolitic and tactless in saying this, but rage had mounted. Her chins were shaking. The man's clothes smelled of pipe smoke. His collar wasn't clean. He was a dog. The kitchen door slammed. She dreaded that

Adam might lose his temper and thrash this fellow. The man looked over her head.

"Here," said Adam, "get out the way, Mamma, please! Let's settle this! Come ahead, Benj'mina. He can't hurt you." He was leading the girl down the steps by a hand. Smoke welled from his nostrils and his eyes had partly shut. He brought the white girl to face her cousin and said, "Now! My name's Adam Egg. Benjamina's married to me. Show him your rings, kid."

The farm hands gasped and an Irish lad whooped. Adam undid his brown fingers from the pale hand. The big diamond and the circlet of little stones blazed below the rosy nails. Mrs. Egg put her palm on her mouth and a scream was a pain in her throat. She hadn't seen Adam married! He threw away the cigarette by a red motion of his tongue and drawled, "Go back in the house, kid!"

The man clamped a hand on his cane and said "Without my permission!"

"She's twenty," Adam grunted, his shoulders tremulous under the thin blue shirt, "so what you goin' to do?"

Then nothing happened. Benjamina walked up the steps and stood with an arm about Hamish at the top. A farm hand lit a pipe. Mrs. Egg's heart beat horribly with the pain of having missed Adam's wedding. The man's face was getting green. He was odious, completely. He said, "Their property stays in my control!"

"To hell with their property!"

Nothing happened. The man stood poking his cane into the turf and turning the thick end among grass blades. Hamish came down one step. Then the man backed and whirled up his cane.

Mrs. Egg shrieked "Dammy!" and bruised her lip with her teeth.

The heavy cane seemed to balance a long while against the sun. Adam stood. The thing fell across his right shoulder and broke with a cracking sound. The blue shirt tore and Benjamina screamed. Adam's whole length shook and his lips were gray for a second. He slung out both hands and caught the fellow's throat. He said, "Now! You've 'saulted me with a dangerous weapon, see? Now, get out of here! Here's your witnesses! You hit me! All I've got

to do is walk you in to a judge and you'll get a year, see? That's law! Get out of this! I could kill you," he drawled, "an' I will if you ain't out the gates in one minute!"

His shoulders heaved. The shirt split down his back. The man went spinning in a queer rotation along the grass, like some collapsing toy. Adam stood with his hands raised, watching. The figure stumbled twice. Then it lurched toward the white gates in a full run, and the farm hands yelled. Adam dropped his hands and ripped the shirt from his shoulder. A band of scarlet had risen on the bronze of his chest. He said thickly, "Damn if he ain't a husky! Hey, Hamish, get me some iodine, will you?"

Benamina ran down the steps and dragged the rings from her fingers. She babbled, "Oh! Oh, Adam! What did you let him strike you for? I'm so sorry!" She thrust the rings into one of his palms and cried, "You shouldn't have let him hit you! He's so strong!"

"What was I goin' to say if he said to show any weddin' certificate? If he hit me it was assault, an' I could get rid of him."

Mrs. Egg wailed, "Then you ain't married, Dammy?" "No."

Adam leaned on the apple tree and stared at Benamina, turning the rings in his hand. After a moment the girl flushed and walked away into the orchard of rustling boughs. A morning wind made the giant's torn shirt flap. He sent his eyes to the gaping hired men and drawled "What about those cows?"

Feet thudded off on the grass. Hamish came bounding down the steps with a bottle of iodine and a handkerchief.

"My gee, Dammy," said Mrs. Egg, grasping the bottle, "if your sisters have the nerve to say you're tactless after this I'll—— Sit down, lamb! Oh, Dammy, how can you think as fast as that?"

Adam lit a cigarette and blew **smoke** through his nostrils. His face was again blank and undisturbed. He asked "Peaches for breakfast?" absently.

"Anything you want, lamb! Benamina has oatmeal ready."

He clicked the rings in his hand and his feet wriggled in the moccasins. Then he said "Mamma," strangely.

"Yes, Dammy."

"Mamma, I've put Miss Saunders in a hell of a position sayin' we're married."

"That's so, Dammy. It'll be all over town in no time."

Adam arose from the grass and examined his mother for a whole minute. His nostrils shook somewhat. He took the engagement ring from one palm and handed it to Hamish, ordering, "Kid, you go take that to your sister and tell her it's with my compliments. I hate talkin'."

The boy's red hair went flashing under the trees. Mrs. Egg watched him halt by his sister, who was wiping her eyes beside a trunk. They conferred. Soon Hamish turned about and began to make swift signs with his arms.

Adam said, "Good enough. . . . I guess I'll call her Ben." He lit his next cigarette and walked up the steps.

Mrs. Egg screamed, "Dammy! Ain't you goin' to go kiss her?"

Adam's eyes opened on his mother in alarm.

He said, "I'm thirsty, Mamma. And I've got to get a fresh shirt. Couldn't kiss anybody in this one. It wouldn't be polite."

Then he waved his cigarette to his new love and slammed the kitchen door behind him.

THE KISS OF THE ACCOLADE

By JAMES W. BENNETT

From Short Stories

THE daily launch from Papeëte was yet a winking speck in the distance, bright sunlight rebounding from its polished brass-work. That glitter was a signal; the native women began to gather, as they always did when a boat of any size arrived. Their magpie chatter rose on the quiet morning air.

I was excitedly chewing the end of a Batavian cheroot, and keeping my eyes glued upon the launch. A moment later I sighed with relief, for I saw a tall, white-clad individual standing at the bow. A breech-clouted Polynesian snubbed a rope around a stanchion, and the lone passenger stepped forth.

"My name is Manwaring," he began, "Augustus Lee Manwaring. I am the new American consul for Moröea——"

"Exactly," I interrupted, smiling. "I've been expecting you, although——"

But apparently the passenger was not to be deterred. He tossed back a lock of tangled black hair with a redundant, statesmanlike gesture, and launched into a speech. The speech was long and prosy, filled with rodomontade. It was in vivid contrast with the palpable youth of the speaker: the gawky, boyish arms, the awkward posturing.

My smile must have grown fixed as I listened. The morning was hot, and that particular point was in the broiling sunlight. A ripple of merriment came from the circle of Moröean women. I turned with a frown. Their faces grew preternaturally sober; then one peal of laughter rose uncontrollably.

"Miss Adorée," I said sharply in Tahitian, "thou wilt leave at once! Else I instruct thy father to punish thee!"

The girl who had been admonished pouted a pretty mouth at me. "I do not wish to remain, anyway, thou cross old white man!" Nevertheless, she reluctantly moved away from the circle.

But to all the byplay Manwaring seemed indifferent. Evidently he had memorized that oration on the ship coming down to Tahiti. Although his eyes were mirroring a decided disappointment that he was being met by a masculine committee of one, he was not to be deterred from his speech.

There was a certain poetic justice in the fact that I was the committee of one. If I hadn't grown lonely—absurdly lonely for a man of my years—and if one Raoul Laverne hadn't been such an unmitigated rascal, Augustus Lee might still have been in his small Carolina town waiting for his appointment.

Laverne had been the American consular agent for Moröea. I had caught him in the act of copying my consular invoices, presumably for the benefit of the Fayette Frères, a French firm in Tahiti. I had been suspecting the man for a long time; the Fayette Frères had been outbidding me too steadily in the San Francisco copra market.

Yes, I was lonely. Laverne was the only other white man in Moröea. To speak of him as white, was to give him the benefit of a lot of doubt. His skin was a fairly lively *colorado maduro*, and he was said to be at least one quarter Polynesian. When I came upon him red-handedly juggling my invoices, I was given a practical peg whereon to hang my loneliness.

I took up the matter with Winthrop, the consul at Papeëte. Also I spoke vaguely to him of new steamship lines and increase of export, topping off my remarks with the pointed suggestion that Moröea be given a bona-fide American consul instead of a consular agent of Laverne's stamp.

It must have been the first problem of any importance that had come before Winthrop for months. He must have worked on it tooth-and-nail; for Manwaring descended upon me a quarter of a year later, a painted plaque, displaying the consular coat-of-arms slung over his shoulder, and his commission in his trunk.

The second evening after his arrival Manwaring came to call upon me. It was the "official" consular visit. I watched him, from my lanai, as he stalked up that hot

stretch of beach. He was in full evening regalia: silk hat, gold-headed cane, and a black dress-coat with the longest tails I had ever seen. He was followed by a straggling procession of naked native children, but he paid not the slightest heed to their catcalls.

When he arrived, his face was dripping and his mouth looked drawn. I rushed him a cool drink and suggested hurriedly that he divest himself of that black coat. He made no verbal reply to my suggestion, but his face was answer enough. An American consul without his coat!

The lemon-squash apparently relieved him. Also I set a native boy to fanning vigorously with a punkah that I had imported from India.

I brought out the cigars and cocktails a few moments later. He blinked at the cocktail mixer, but nonchalantly reached for his glass and raised it to his lips. The next instant he was coughing and sputtering.

"Good lord, man!" I expostulated. "Haven't you ever drunk that stuff before?"

"No!" came a hoarse, strangled whisper.

"Well, if you're a teetotaler, don't let me start you on——"

"Must, Mr. Thayler!" he gurgled. "Mustn't ever—offend one's host—by refusing!"

"My son," I admired, "I see a great future before you! I believe you're going to be a perfect consul!"

He took the compliment calmly, apparently ignoring any latent irony that might have been found in my words. I attempted to get him to talk about himself, but, in spite of that bombastic way he had of discussing affairs in general, he was more or less reticent. After a space though, and by dint of more or less adroit questioning on my part, he gave me smatterings of his life in his drawling, formal way.

He had always hankered after a career of diplomacy, and had studied international law almost since he could remember. He was the only son of a doting mother, who apparently had fostered in him the penchant for after-dinner speech. With the exception of two years of college, his life had been spent in his native Carolina village. He had dreams of a big consul generalship, sometime, somewhere. Then he launched into a long diatribe about the grasping qualities of American firms who did the vampire act on innocent islands—"Sucking

their life-blood!" (Flourish.) "And, by gad, sir, I'm here to stop it!" (Another flourish.)

I listened; I didn't set him right. He was so pitifully young, and it was his first post.

He fell silent, and we both sat for several minutes gazing over the glistening stretch of sandy beach. Even as we looked, the moon flooded over the crest of the island like a dammed-in lake that had broken all barriers. It made a wide path of gold over the quiet waters of the harbour. I had spent thirty of my fifty years in the tropics, but I never tired of the necromancy of a South Sea night. Even my cigar smoke made silver whorls in the soft light.

I half turned to catch Manwaring's profile, and I was conscious of a boyish, eager expression in his eyes. It nullified completely the blasting effect of that long diatribe. The eyes were warm and friendly and seeking; they seemed to say, "Pshaw, all these fulminations of mine are very fine. But, really, I'm only a bewildered youngster, and I'm just a bit worried and nervous over it all."

Manwaring stirred as I leaned forward and reached for another cigar.

"By the by," he began, with that awkward flourish of the hand, "an individual—Laverne—he proffered a request that he be permitted to see your invoices this morning. I believe the fellow even hinted at a—a sort of bribery. I was forced, sir, to trundle him from the consulate. I relieved him of a short but ugly-appearing knife——"

"You did? Well, bully for you, Mr. Manwaring!"

"There is no cause for congratulation, sir. It was most unpleasant, but—ah—necessary."

Laverne was a large and powerfully built man, I knew. I stared now, with newly opened eyes, at the muscles bulging beneath that terrible-fitting black coat of Manwaring's. And there he sat, far into the night, gently perspiring, his eyes peering eagerly forth, as though seeking the answer to the riddle of life in this out-of-the-way end of the earth.

Manwaring ushered me into his office the next morning with his usual pompous formality. I dumped a sheaf of invoices on to his desk for a consular *chop*. He gave them a hopeful glance. They would mean work! But after that

first hopeful flush subsided, he stared at me bleakly. I knew what that look meant. He was already beginning to realize that the Department of State had handed him the prize lime in their citrus crop for consuls.

"Mr. Thayler," he began mournfully, "I think I've made out every report demanded in the 'General Instructions Circulars' and the 'Regulations.' 'Mines?' We haven't any! 'Schools?' Ditto! 'Manufacturing Plants?' The same!" He laughed, but without much humour in the sound. "Why—why, this place doesn't need a consul! It——"

"Oh, yes, it does!" I interposed hastily. The thought that my invoices would go, unobserved, to the place they belonged—well, the thought made me selfishly blind to the incontrovertible truth of Manwaring's statements. "Besides," I continued, with an effort to be optimistic, "something special may come up——"

"What?" he demanded eagerly.

"Oh, stranded seamen." I probed a vague memory. "Or barratry, or a—a marine survey."

"I'm afraid I won't be accorded any such good fortune. But"—Manwaring turned toward his desk—"there's something here I want to ask you about. I received this an hour or so ago. I think it was supposed to be by a special messenger; at least the boy wasn't as naked as they usually are. He actually was wearing a pair of trousers!"

Manwaring handed me a letter written on lavender stationery. It was in French. I translated:

Cher monsieur le consul:

I have the extreme and undivided honour of requesting your esteemed presence at dinner this evening. I have the magnificent desire to present to you, at such a time, my consort, Jeanne. Also, my daughter, the Princess Adorée.

Trusting that you enjoy the excellence of great health, I have the honour to be, sir,

With greatest sincerity,
KUNALULANKO, *Rex*.

Manwaring could hardly wait until I had finished. "Who are these people? And the 'Rex'? Frankly, Mr. Thayler, I shall have to depend upon you. What recognition should I give them?"

I laughed. "I don't know where Kuna picked up that

signature. In a way, I suppose he has a right to use it. He's the native prince of Morōea. Jeanne, his wife, is about three hundred pounds of French woman. And his daughter——" I laughed again. "Beware!"

Manwaring didn't seem to appreciate my levity. "What's the matter with the daughter?" he queried a bit tartly.

"Nothing, my son, except that she's considered dangerous. She wears a string of broken hearts, native and white. Her most bizarre charm seems to be that she dances the old, real, Tahitian hula—not the importation for the tourist. By the way, you must have seen her; she was down on the beach the day you arrived. But you were so busy with that speech of yours."

He flushed a little at my words. He must have realized by now how absurd that speech of his had been.

"I'm wondering," he asked hesitatingly, "should I accept this invitation?"

"Well, I only know that Winthrop, your *confrère* at Papeëte, has been over—a couple of times, I believe—since I came here year before last."

"That settles it!" Manwaring sighed in evident relief. Royalty was royalty! A dinner in his honour, given by a "Rex," must have seemed to approximate a few of these bombastic dreams that were circling around so visibly in his head.

I returned home and found a similar note from Kuna. The prince was foreman of my native gang, but I decided that my dignity as employer could go hang for one night.

We arrived at seven-thirty, Manwaring in white dress-clothes now. I had prevailed upon him to commission a Chinese tailor at Papeëte—who would fashion a suit of any description in six hours.

Manwaring received his first jolt when he saw the habitation of the prince, for Kuna lived in the usual native hut of bamboo and thatched palm. He did not realize that it was larger, however, than the other huts of the village, and was lighted by several swinging smoky lamps, a decided touch of modernity. Manwaring swallowed twice and resolutely entered.

The chief, barefoot, but dressed in whites, welcomed us volubly in French, and introduced his Gargantuan wife. Jeanne smirked a greeting, but, as Manwaring stood before

her, she made no effort to get to her feet. One always envisaged derricks when thinking of Jeanne rising. Her white, slightly greasy face and blonde hair made her appearance seem odd in that room filled with natives; for the dukes and lords and other members of the royal entourage were present in solid array.

Adorée, the princess, sat modestly at the back of the room, waiting until her father should bring the consul to her for an introduction. Then she raised herself lithely and curtsied in the old Victorian style.

I was watching Manwaring closely as he met her. I looked for an expression of surprise, and I found it. His mouth formed the letter "O," and his breath caught. He seemed to regain his poise, then, and he bowed very gravely. Older men than Manwaring had been bowled over by the beauty of Adorée. The echo of it had reached me, even at Raratonga, more than two years before.

From Jeanne, the French mother, she had been given a wavy mass of hair, lighter in colour than that of her native kinswomen, eyes of a deep violet blue, and a smile that was a pure coquetry. Yet from Kuna came the lyric, graceful figure, that deliberate grace which is the heritage of generations of lotus-eaters. The wonder of it was that she could give this impression of beauty, for she was clad in the horrible "Mother Hubbard" dress that Polynesian women always don when they wish to be in their "company best."

We met the rest of the guests and finally were seated, cross-legged, on fibre mats while the feast was spread before us.

Once Manwaring glanced at me with a look of reproach, but he played his part faultlessly. He could not have been more gracious, in his absurdly stilted way, if he had been dining with European royalty.

As the inevitable roast pig was brought in, I heard a grunting noise, as a live pig thrust his snout under my arm.

"Hi!" I shouted. "Get out!" Somehow, I had never been able to accustom myself to dining, *au naturel*, with the porcine members of a native family. Manwaring stared at me, saw the pig, and his eyes glazed. "Now, young man," I apostrophized inwardly, "if you can stand that blow, you're a real diplomat!"

He stood it nobly.

Kuna clapped his hands; a servant appeared, and the pig was driven forth squealing. Chickens, live fowls, also joined the party, but these we tactfully ignored.

Vintage champagne was served. That Continental wine always puts in its incongruous appearance at Tahitian *luaus*. Manwaring sipped courageously from his glass, as he had done the night before at my quarters. He made a subtle pretense, also, at eating the raw prawns and sea-urchins.

As the débris of the feast was being cleared away Kuna brought in some fifty singers, and we prepared to listen to the "hymenies."

It is difficult to describe this music; there is such a haunting beauty about it that inwardly I find an absurd lump in my throat. The natives chant sagas of the South Seas, stories of the Island gods, always in a vibrant minor key. The total effect is something like that of a symphony orchestra. The only instruments used are dull-toned skin drums. The resonant bigness is attained solely by the human voice. Heard from a distance the hymenies are inevitably mistaken for orchestral music.

The singing continued for an hour, while I leaned against the side wall of the hut dreaming and smoking. But, as I listened, the tempo of the music quickened. The singers in the centre of the hut moved back, and Adorée swung into the open space. She had doffed her atrocious Mother Hubbard, and stood poised before us garbed in a single gaudy *pareau* cloth of splotched purple and red.

Then she began to dance. I had seen the Tahitian and Samoan hulas, performed by the greatest on the Islands, but never before had I witnessed such a dance as on this night. She moved slowly at first, and then with an ever-increasing tempo. She was like the spirit of the island. The languor, the fire, the sensuousness of the South Seas, was in her swaying figure. There was a beauty about the dance that spelled madness.

Her eyes, from the very start, were upon Manwaring. She was dancing for him, yet her outstretched arms seemed to be reaching caressingly, pleadingly, toward the rest of us, all inclusive. I shrugged my shoulders, tried to break the spell, and succeeded to the extent that I began to feel a presentiment of trouble. I knew how the dance would end, and I was afraid.

I turned toward Manwaring. He was standing, leaning against the side wall, his face a complete puzzle. At first I thought I detected repugnance, for parts of the dance were as elemental as Nature herself. Then I could see he was being swept away by the barbaric thrill of the music, that quick, blood-tingling chant, that fast thud-thud of the drums, and by the flashing movement of Adorée's body as she swayed and circled.

She reached her crescendo, whirling madly. She uttered a low, moaning cry, a call, and rushed to Manwaring. The next instant her body was pressed tightly against his; her arms were about him, and her lips were lifted for the kiss that must be given. It was the finale of the Tahitian hula. The kiss was the accolade, the reward of the dance.

I cursed feebly. I should have warned Manwaring of this; for if he failed to give the kiss he offered her the unforgivable insult. But my fears of the moment were unfounded. He bent gravely and kissed her full upon the lips.

Adorée gave a happy sigh and moved demurely away, flashing a smile at my gray head as I spoke a word of praise. Manwaring was gazing after her with eyes that were lighted with strange and smouldering fires. They were not the eager, questioning eyes of the boy who had stepped so jauntily from the launch a scant half-week before. And, as we walked home that night, he enveloped himself in a brooding silence.

An off-scheduled ship was due to put into port that next week. Ships always meant an unholy spurt of work from my men and equally severe labour on my part. The second day following Kuna's *luau* I was running around in circles, damning a native *compradore* for an incomplete list, losing my temper, and otherwise blowing off steam.

That was the morning, unfortunately, on which Manwaring chose to pay me a visit. He wandered over to my office, walking with the drooping, aimless saunter which told its own story. Undoubtedly he had been goaded into coming by thoughts of that hot, whitewashed consular office of his.

The day was sickeningly warm, and my disposition was plopping and sizzling with little blister marks as I turned and snapped at him, "Well, what do you want, Manwaring?"

He stared at me in surprise, and then replied a bit haltingly, "Ah—ah, I was just passing, just passing by here."

"Now, I'm sorry, but you mustn't bother me. The *Elmira Stokes* is due in port next Monday. I've got to kick a cargo into shape for her." And out I hustled. Then, I confess, I forgot him totally and completely.

When I rushed back to my office, two hours later, he was still sitting there. He rose with a flourish, gave me one of his bleak glances, and his eyes seemed to have grown immeasurably colder.

"Sir, I shall bid you good morning. I regret that I've troubled you. I have only waited in order to make my farewell——"

"What nonsense, Manwaring! Now, why did you do that? There was no need of your waiting! I'm just as busy as the very devil to-day!"

He bowed very low at this and stalked out. I glanced for an instant at that uncompromising back of his as he went rigidly down the beach toward the lonely consulate. How like him it was to wait half a morning in order to make a courteous exit!

Of course, I should have gone over to his house that day and patched things up; for I knew the tropics, and I knew the probable consequences if I failed to act. Tempers here are always at a nasty tinder heat; and slights, brooded over, have a habit of suddenly growing mountain-high. Manwaring couldn't throw himself into work, as I could, and forget his slights, fancied or otherwise. All that remained for him was to sit and try to read his trade reports. And who can read when the thermometer registers a dripping-damp ninety-four day after day?

But I didn't see Manwaring. My good intentions were buried under an avalanche of work, eighteen hours a day of it. Friday of that week whirled around before I found time to visit him—and then it was too late. I was received with a hopelessly rigid formality.

He saw the documents under my arm, and he spoke with the measured tone of a judge pronouncing sentence. I decided that he was pronouncing sentence—upon our friendship.

"If you will place the invoices on the table, sir, I shall take them up at my earliest convenience."

"But, Manwaring, I'd like them attended to right away."

"They will be completed in sufficient time."

"But——"

"I repeat, they will be completed in sufficient time."

Then my own temper boiled over. "Hell, man, what's the matter with you?"

He made no reply to this. Instead, he gave me a cold, level stare.

I grabbed my hat and moved hurriedly toward the door. I didn't dare trust myself to further speech. And, as I quick-stepped it home, I told myself angrily, "I'll let that young fool strictly alone for a time, till he can come to his senses!"

After I'd cooled down a bit I began to feel almighty sorry for Manwaring. I realized how this sudden shift in affairs must be knocking every prop from under him. I had been the only person he could approach for advice, the only companion during the long, quiet evenings.

Whatever he felt, he made no move toward capitulation. During the entire fortnight which followed, even when the *Elmira Stokes* had come and departed, he did not set foot inside my door. He carried things so far as to return my copy of the invoices by messenger.

I waited and I waited, and then, after still a third week had been marked off my calendar, I decided one evening to take matters into my own hands, even at the risk of a second rebuff. Once this decision was made, I hurried through my dinner and walked briskly toward the consulate.

As I neared the building I saw the figure of a woman, clad in white, coming from the opposite direction. There was something furtive about her movements, and I stopped and watched her. She hurried, with several side glances, toward the door of the consulate. After a moment's hesitation there she entered without ringing the bell.

I took an impulsive step forward and then I checked myself. Decidedly, this was no time for ill-considered action. I would have to do some real thinking before I plunged into that building.

The consulate was located on a slight rise above the beach, and Manwaring had dragged a bench, evidently from his kitchen, on to a little knoll at the left of the house. I sat down there and tried to work out the situation clearly. The whole thing had an ugly look—Manwaring and a native woman! He was the American consul; he couldn't afford

such an affair. I would be a poor sort of friend if I failed to interfere. Yet the very difficulty of my task appalled me. I began to hesitate, to try and formulate the sort of speech that I must make.

The evening was quiet. White spurts of spray rose and fell on the near horizon, as wave after wave dashed madly against the coral reef. The night wind sighed redolently in the feathered tops of the palms. Spice and wild-orange blossom—— Then the strain of those past weeks proved too much for me. Even the troubles of Manwaring grew misty-dim. I fell into a doze.

I awoke with something of a start. That same figure had left the consulate and was moving in my direction. I sat very still. She was looking out over the harbour as she went, and did not see me. I might have guessed; it was Adorée.

My first thought was to stop her. Then I decided that I must wait. Perhaps it had only been a chance visit. My accusation was of too grave a nature to be unsubstantiated. If she went to Manwaring's the next evening, I would plump my unwelcome self down there while they were together.

I spent the day fuming, worrying, and smoking more than was good for me. But by nightfall I was firmly decided upon my course of action.

Again I loitered outside the consulate, hoping against hope. It was nearly an hour before Adorée appeared. But the very sight of her, stealing into the house, strengthened my resolution. I walked quietly to the *lanai* and stood, hesitating, before ringing the bell. As I waited, I could hear his voice, lower pitched than ordinary, but, as ever, oratorical in its tone:

"But, Princess Adorée, you must not come here. It is very charming of you—and—and I have been exceedingly lonely of late. But—well, you must not——"

"Ah—Adorée, she ees not ver' interrest' to the ggreat Americain consu-el?"

Manwaring laughed, with an embarrassed note. "Yes, I'm afraid she is; that's just it. But, I must repeat, you——"

His words were hushed by a peal of laughter, a melody that made me think of tiny, tinkling bells. Then I interrupted with the harsher, dissonant note of his house gong.

As the echo died away there was an absolute stillness. I

groaned inwardly; that silence seemed guilty. After a short moment I heard Adorée whisper:

"Oh-a, I mus' go. I mus' not be seen weeth——"

"No!" came Manwaring's voice, with a note of command. "There is nothing wrong about your being here! Stay where you are!"

I sighed in utter relief at his words; my appearance was not belated, after all. The statement was so like Manwaring. He saw nothing wrong in her presence there, and he would not spirit her away. I could hear his firm tread as he moved toward the door.

That morning, three weeks before, I had thought him cold, but it could not compare with the chilliness of his reception now. Not a word that I could pin down as rude, just his manner!

I set my jaws and moved, unasked, into the room. I bowed to Adorée and seated myself. "Now," I began, turning directly to her, "how long has this been going on?"

"What, Monsieur Thayler?" She was gazing innocently at me.

"Your coming here."

Manwaring's level voice cut in: "You'll kindly not put my guest upon the witness stand."

I turned to him. "If your guest doesn't wish her father to lose his job, she'll answer a few questions!" That was a bluff and Adorée knew it even though Manwaring didn't for she smiled slightly. Kuna was my right-hand man.

Nevertheless, she turned to me quite gravely.

"Monsieur Thayler, you do not need to makka question. I know zat wheech you weel say. I know zat I have makka meestake to come hee-re. Only, I do not—I do not keer."

She rose to her feet and walked slowly toward me. Her eyes were suddenly hot and rebellious.

"I do not keer! There ees not'ing wr-rong about me hee-re! Monsieur Manwaring, he ees so ver' deeferen'. He—he trreat me likka rreal princess! So kind, so mooch of—what you say?—ze court-say. I have nev-air know' a man likka heem! Zat peeg of a Laverne—he bothair me. Every day he say he want marry me. He say he want marry me,

an' ze ver' nex' moment he makka hit at me weeth hees fist!
An'—an'——"

Adorée hesitated, then her voice took on a deeper, more intense tone. "An' Monsieur Manwaring, he ees so ver' good! Excep' zat time of hula, he have nev-vair even kees me! An' I have ask' heem to——"

"Adorée!" Manwaring interjected. He was gazing at her, his sallow face flushed with embarrassment.

I looked at them both and began wondering what on earth I could say. This was no ordinary tropic liaison; I should have known that it wouldn't be. Yet there was more danger for Manwaring than if the situation had been more elemental.

"Miss Adorée," I began hesitatingly, "you like Monsieur Manwaring?"

"I do! Oh-a, ver' mooch do I—love heem!" There was a childish naïveté in her tone that could not be feigned. I heard Manwaring groan at the admission.

"Yes? You say that you love him? And yet—" I paused to impress my point, "and yet you would ruin him? Monsieur Manwaring will some day be a very great man; he will be if he is left to—to follow his star. Now you—do you want to kill every chance he has in life? If you go on this way, you'll do it. Adorée, you don't seem to understand. But won't you try now to understand that much?"

I rose from my chair. I had said all that I dared. Adorée sat looking dazedly at me. For an instant she raised her eyes to mine, and they seemed stricken. That look bored deep. Yet I would not have changed a single word.

Manwaring followed me out the door, first making a sign to Adorée to wait for him. I expected him to rail out at me; I almost hoped he would. Instead, he walked silently by my side.

At last I could stand it no longer.

"Say something, man—say what you think! My shoulders are broad enough."

"There's little to say," he answered, slowly. "You happen to be right. And I—well, I appreciate the courage it took for you to speak as you did. It was just madness; but I'm like Adorée, I don't care! I don't, I tell you! Good God, man, I wonder if you realize what—well, what loneliness is! I thought I was going to lose my mind. That infernal boom—

ing of the surf—that hot white office—nothing to do but listen to the buzzing of a million flies—nothing to do! A consul in this place? Hell, it's a damn, ghastly farce!"

As I looked at his set boyish face, a sick loathing for myself swept over me. The responsibility for his being here, the whole responsibility, was mine!

I pointed to the bench where I had sat the night before. "How did it all start?" I asked him gently, as we seated ourselves.

"Loneliness," he replied, "and then more loneliness! And when she came, it all stopped! It was like a beautiful magic, a——"

"But how did Adorée happen to begin coming here?"

"She? Well, Laverne and her precious father have been making life hell for her. Kuna is trying to drive her into Laverne's arms. It all began about two weeks ago. I was nearly wild that day. I—I went over to your place, but you were out somewhere. Then I wandered in the direction of Laverne's. I felt that I must see—just set my eyes on another white man, even if it were only Laverne."

Manwaring hesitated an instant and then laughed with incredible bitterness.

"Laverne? White? As I neared his house I heard a cry for help. I got there on the run. I found Laverne trying to kiss Adorée. She was struggling in his arms—and Kuna was sitting and looking on like a damn gargoyle. I—well, I stopped that. And Adorée—her gratitude was pitiable."

"And it has developed into this?"

"Yes, Thayler, it has developed into this."

"Well, my boy, you've got to listen to me, to an older man. This thing must stop! I've lived in these islands all my life. I've yet to see the man that doesn't go under with a native—wife!"

"I told you that I knew it was madness! And I've fought against it. But the thought of going back to all that ungodly loneliness——"

"Manwaring, there are far worse things than loneliness!"

"If there are, I've never discovered them!"

I looked at him for a long moment. That eager, boyish look was gone. He had grown to a man's stature, yet the metamorphosis was ugly.

"Manwaring," I told him slowly, "I hope to the great God that you never will discover them!"

Then I left him. I wanted a little stretch of that loneliness in which to think out the problem. He was like a straw at the edge of the whirlwind; only a breath, and he would be sent spinning into the vortex.

Just as I reached the clearing at my first plantation I heard the pattering of bare feet. I turned, and Adorée drew up before me.

"Monsieur Thayler, I have follow' you. You are gooda frien' of—heem; you have say ze trrue woord zis night. After you have go, I did tell heem adieu!" Her eyes were brimming with tears, and her hands twisted nervously. "Oh-a, my—my heart—eet weel bbreak, banga!—into ze two piece'! But—eet ees far, far bettair, yes?"

"Yes, Adorée," I answered, gently. "Yes, it is far, far better."

She suddenly dropped to the ground and began to sob bitterly, with all the abandon of the women of the tropics when they give way completely.

"Oh-a, oh-a!" she moaned. "My heart, eet weel—bbreak—in ze two piece'!"

My own heart constricted, but words of mine seemed futile. At last I reached down and patted her on the shoulder. She caught my hand and pressed it to her cheek. "You are hees frien'—hees frien'! I mus' be hees frien', too!"

"Yes. And you must be brave, also. Remember, you are Adorée, Princess of the Island of Moröea."

I had blundered upon the right note, for she raised herself with a touch of pride.

"I weel remembair; I am ze princess!" Then she rose to her feet and walked slowly away.

And I, from the height of fifty years, sighed over the heart-breaks and the pain of youth. Sighed, wondered, and was afraid.

I was sitting listlessly at my desk the following morning, seeing the tragic face of Adorée instead of the black rows of export figures, when Manwaring burst in upon me. He was as pale as that baggy but immaculate white suit of his.

"Gone!" he gasped. "Gone!"

"Who? Adorée?"

"No, your invoices, the whole batch of them! I haven't any safe—idea of a consular building without even a strong box! It's criminal! I'm going to write the Department about——"

"Wait! Never mind about safes now! You mean the invoices for the *Esperanto* next week?"

"Yes, Thayler. Your regular monthly batch! They've been stolen!"

I sat down suddenly. The copra market was in ticklish shape; and I began trying to fathom just how much damage the leak would do. "It's Laverne's work, of course. But, how to prove——"

That was all Manwaring needed. "Laverne? Come on, then! We'll go over there now!"

"No. Wait a moment. We haven't any proof." Then an idea came to me. "I'm not sure, but I think I have a plan. But, by the way, just what will this theft mean to you, Manwaring?"

"Well, if I don't find the papers, I shall send a cable announcing the fact. And the Department will probably wire back, 'Your resignation accepted.' They have that habit at Washington, I'm told."

"If that's the case, we'd better get to work. Suppose you go back to the consulate and make another search?"

He nodded and walked rapidly away. As soon as he was well out of sight I set about putting my idea to the test.

I went to Kuna's hut. Jeanne, sitting in lonely grandeur at the door, smirked at me and began to chatter in parrot-like French. She sent an urchin after Adorée, and the girl entered shyly a moment later. Turning to Jeanne, I asked permission to speak to her daughter in private. She nodded good-naturedly.

Once we were alone in the hut, I began without preface, "Adorée, tell me what you know of the papers that were stolen from Monsieur Manwaring's desk?" It was a shot in the dark, but it went home with startling force.

She put her hand to her throat and swayed suddenly. "What—what do you know?"

"I want to find out what you know?"

Something in the uncertainty of my tone must have warned

her. She stiffened and began to speak—I would have sworn—guardedly.

“I have heerd frrom—frrom somewheere, zat ze papier of Monsieur Manwaring were stole’. I am ver’ soree.”

Then I risked another blind volley. I grasped her arm and fairly shouted at her, “Why did you steal them?”

Her eyes widened, but she looked at me apathetically.

“Oh-a, you know, then. I do not have need to makka ze explain’.”

“You did steal them!”

“Yes.” Her tone was low and hopeless.

I suppose that my eyes must have mirrored my disgust, for I was thinking how completely she had fooled me the night before.

She drew away from me, and her hand fluttered out with a mute appeal.

“Oh-a, you—you do not have ze understandings——”

“It looks plain enough to me,” I cut in angrily. “You steal from him, you who said she was the friend of——”

“Wait—wait—pleas’. Oh-a, I shall tell you, Monsieur Thayler. Zat Laverne, zat mad-dog of a Laverne, he say he weel keel Monsieur Manwaring eef—eef I don’ steal zat papier! . He say eet not ver’ importante papier! An’, eef I takka eet, zat he weel not keel Monsieur le Consul! To savva hees life—— Oh-a, Monsieur Thayler, but Monsieur Manwaring ees my grreat frien’—I have consent’ to steal zat papier. Eet was on hees desk las’ night, an’ I deed takka eet, oh-a, so gladly! I have savva hees, hees——”

“All right, all right,” I interrupted, grudgingly. “I believe you, though the Lord knows why I should! But those papers which you think so unimportant, they’ll undoubtedly cause Manwaring to lose his position. Our government will tell him that he—he can’t be consul any more.” I was trying to translate the thought into words she could best comprehend. “Do you understand? His whole career will go to smash!”

“Yes. Oh-a, yes, I ondeerstan’,” she replied in a low, still tone.

“Then, if you’ll go with me now, to Laverne’s, we can make him——”

“No! Oh-a, no! He—he weel keel you! He has keel morre zan two, t’ree man. I do know Tahitian man zat he

has keel. For myself, I do not keer. I do but have to makka smile, an' he forrget. He only t'eenk to strikka blow w'en I—what you say?—I frrown."

"But I'm not the slightest bit afraid of him. Come on!"

"No!" The monosyllable was stubborn. "No, but wait. I weel get zat papier back." She was silent for a moment; then unexpectedly she sobbed. "I know a way! Oh-a, I know a way!"

Adorée turned and fairly ran from the dim interior of the hut. I looked after her, startled and wondering.

And that afternoon my wonderment grew; for Kuna came parading over to my office, his sly brown face shining with perspiration and pride.

"My daughter," he began pompously, "she has consent to obey ze roy'l command of her father. Tomorra she weel wed ze grreat an' pow'ful Monsieur Laverne. To-night you weel come to my home—hein? We shall have ze grrreat *luau*! Adorée weel dance ze hula of maidenhood for ze las' time. Eet ees not good zat ze marrie' womans dance eet."

I dismissed Kuna with the promise of my attendance and went immediately over to Manwaring's. He was sitting at that desk of his, across which so little business had ever been transacted. His hands were clasped over his forehead.

"You've heard, eh? Adorée's marriage?"

"Yes," he replied. "She was here, and she—— God Almighty, man, she cried when she told me!"

"I—I'm sorry, Manwaring. I know how a native girl can creep into a man's heart. Yet, dammit, I can't help feeling selfishly glad!" I stopped and lighted a cigar. "No trace of our invoices?"

He shook his head. "I've looked high and low. I would have sworn they were on my desk last night."

"Yes, I suppose so. But another thing I wanted to ask you: are you going to Kuna's?"

"Yes. Adorée demanded it in a way that I couldn't refuse. But, Thayler, why is she doing this thing? She hates Laverne. Why, why is she doing this?"

"I don't know! I don't begin to—to—Good Lord, the longer I live in these islands the less I can fathom them!"

Once more a *luau* was in progress at Kuna's. Laverne was everywhere, smiling, smirking, and bowing. He had all the

graces of a Latin, but with that curdling touch of native blood which made his every movement seem sinister. He was even inclined to be gracious to Manwaring and myself. His gestures showed that he knew he was the top-dog; he had won Adorée, and somewhere he had secreted my invoices.

I imagined that he was gloating over that valuable information which would so soon go to Fayette Frères. On the morrow, when he took Adorée to the priest in Papeète, he would undoubtedly make a business call upon his partners.

The feast was consumed in comparative silence. Adorée sat with her eyes fixedly lowered, eating nothing and speaking with no one. Neither Manwaring nor I did more than toy with our food.

Again came the hymenies, with their chanted stories of love and death.

Then Kuna expansively stood up.

"For ze las' time, ze Princess Adorée weel dance ze ol', ol' dance of Moröea. Nevair have I see' person dance likka Adorée. Hell-dam', I t'eenk I am almos' soree zat she makka marry tomorra wit' Monsieur Laverne!"

I settled myself back and prepared to view the dance with more or less equanimity. Adorée, according to the custom, must dance for Laverne. Her every movement must be for him.

She began—and in a moment I was cursing softly. She was ignoring the Frenchman and was dancing for Manwaring! He stood watching her sombrely.

I glanced toward Laverne. For an incredulous space the Frenchman sat there, startled. Then his eyes began to glitter. They were basilisk eyes—inhuman.

Laverne was possessed of a tremendous breadth of shoulders, and I found myself wishing for my youth, for the time when I had been able to cope with the best of them. I edged nearer the man. I could at least stop him, momentarily, if he made a move that presaged trouble.

How Adorée danced that night! She seemed to be a thing of silver and fire and moonlight! Her lips were smiling and the heart of her was shining in her eyes, shining for that tall, awkward youngster who stood watching her with an intentness equal to Laverne's.

Before the dance was half completed there was a quick,

abrupt movement on the part of Adorée. Without seeming to lose the tempo of the music, she fluttered to Laverne's side of the hut. Swooping downward, her hand flashed into his shirt front and drew forth a bundle of tell-tale blue papers, my invoices! Back she ran swiftly and dropped them in Manwaring's hand, then swung triumphantly into the faster cadence of the music.

Manwaring shoved the packet into his pocket. I doubt if he realized that she had given the invoices to him.

I could hear the astonished Laverne muttering a long string of Tahitian oaths. The grin had left Jeanne's face, and Kuna was frowning blackly. Yet, so strong was the spell Adorée was casting, none made move to halt her.

As she whirled into the final movements of the dance I drew still nearer to Laverne. Then she uttered her low, moaning call and threw herself directly toward Manwaring. His arms were waiting to catch her, too.

Her lips were lifted for his kiss. As he bent his head, I turned involuntarily away from Laverne. As I did so the Frenchman jumped to his feet with catlike speed.

"By God, I keel you bot'!" he shouted, fumbling in his coat pocket. The next instant my ears rang deafeningly with a pistol shot, and the room was filled with acrid blue smoke. I grappled with Laverne, but immediately I felt an arm pulling me away.

Kuna, his eyes blazing, a long copra knife in his hand, threw me aside as though I were an empty cocoanut-sack. He lunged toward Laverne, and his arm rose and fell twice.

I looked toward Adorée. She was still in Manwaring's arms, standing erect, her lips still lifted to him. Again Manwaring bent very gravely and repeated the kiss of the accolade. She sighed; her body grew limp and her head fell forward on his shoulder. He lowered her down and sank on his knees beside her, cradling her body in his arms. Her eyes were closed and her face white. I knew that whiteness.

I walked a bit unsteadily over to him. "Come, Manwaring, old man, she's—she's dead. Come, I tell you!"

He shook his head and turned a blank face toward mine.

"Manwaring," I repeated more insistently, "come with me. We must leave her—with her people."

Perhaps it was the note of command in my voice. He

loosed his arms and obediently followed me out the door and into the blazing splendour of Tahitian night.

The ways of the State Department are devious and strange. It took that august body—and me—six months to repair the crime I had compounded with them against one Augustus Lee Manwaring, the crime of marooning him in a farcical consulate on a tropic island to please the whim of a selfish old man.

I remember the morning when the launch from Tahiti brought over the news. Cool little puffs of sea-breeze were ruffling the plumage of the royal palms. I was sitting, smoking, on my *lanaii*, assisting that breeze with lazy turns of my punkah.

In the distance I spied a briskly moving figure. The shoulders seemed to be a bit straighter, and the head had lost some of the droop that had been worrying me. Manwaring came to the veranda and seated himself on the steps at my feet, a very unconsular attitude.

"Well, Thayler, I'm transferred!"

"Where?" I asked, wearily.

"Milan, Italy!" His voice rose and his eyes lighted with a ghostly semblance of that old, eager, friendly look. It was the first time I had seen any approach to that expression in those six dreary months.

"Reports, man, reports! I've been looking the place up; hundreds of reports: tourists, manufactories, *objets de vertu*, and——"

The words lapsed and the smile faded. He turned his gaze to the view from the *lanaii*.

A bit of pure white cloud seemed to be racing energetically around the summit of the Diadem, the craggy backbone of Moröea. Out to sea, the island of Tahiti was swimming in the blue morning haze. The purple waters of the harbour were flecked with infrequent glints of gold. The song of the natives rose clearly as they chanted at their work in my copra sheds.

When he again faced me, his eyes held that same dull shade I had seen so continuously. A deep, hurt look, the indelible shadow of those tragic islands.

THE SIXTH SHOT

By SAMUEL A. DERIEUX

From Red Book Magazine

THERE was a dance going on in Steve Abernathy's house, far up in the Big Smoky Mountains. The fire roared and crackled in the big broad chimney; the barrel of cider lay by the window, rocking on its stays; the old fiddler sawed at his fiddle and called the figures; the men came swinging down the aisle of girls, snatched their partners, and whirled away; the low-ceiled room rang with shouts and laughter.

But there was trouble brewing, too. For Steve's girl Phœbe was dancing first with Bud Campbell then with Nank Morgan. She didn't mean any harm; she was just turned woman, and the prettiest in the mountains, at that. It was the most natural thing in the world for her while she danced with Bud to throw smiles over her shoulder at Nank, and while she danced with Nank to throw smiles over her shoulder at Bud. Girls always have done that kind of thing and always will. But that doesn't alter the fact that it's a dangerous thing to do in the Big Smoky Mountains.

First Bud Campbell stood in a corner, his chest rising and falling as if he had run a race, his blonde head almost touching the rafters, the grin on his face not good to look at as he watched her whirl away with Nank. A young giant was Bud, just turned eighteen, hardly more than a boy—but boys are men in the mountains as soon as they are ready to love and fight. Phœbe was "his gal"; she had been his ever since his trousers lengthened to his shoe-tops and her dresses lengthened to her ankles. That was the big fact in Bud's life, that Phœbe was "his gal." Nobody had ever dared dispute it until to-night.

Then Nank Morgan, who *had* dared dispute it, stood in the same corner, lean, lank, swarthy, dressed in "city clothes," his mouth drawn tight as a wire, his black appraising eyes full of the devil that possessed him as he watched her whirl away with Bud. He was older than Bud in years; he was ages older in experience. He had been away two years working in town, had come home on a visit, and had dropped in unexpectedly on this dance to-night. He had found Phœbe Abernathy, a girl when he left, now grown into a woman, and very good to dance with. He was not the man to respect another's claim. What Nank Morgan wanted he took.

The two men were neighbours. They had grown up together, fished and hunted together, gone to frolics together. They had been friends when Nank went away; they had met as friends when Nank dropped in to-night. Then Phœbe Abernathy had smiled at Nank, for girls like men who have been away, seen the world, and have come back. Then she had danced with Nank and thrown smiles over her shoulder at Bud. What was happening here in Steve Abernathy's house is the sort of thing that happens everywhere all over the world. But, again, that doesn't alter the fact that it breeds trouble in the Big Smoky Mountains.

Old Steve had had a pull or two at his jug and turned in early. He didn't know anything about it—he wouldn't have minded if he had. Girls must have their fling, and men must have their fights, and old Steve was a philosopher. As for the other dancers, they were young; every man had his girl, every girl had her man. They didn't notice, or if they did, they didn't care.

But there was one in the room who took it all in, and who knew what was coming. He sat by the chimney-corner where the firelight fell upon him, patting his foot and puffing his pipe and stroking his beard—old Bill McCorcle, who never missed a frolic, old Bill who had seen more fights and knew more ways of fighting than any other man in the mountains.

He could tell you how to fight with knives or pistols, with shotguns or rifles—just how far to stand, just how to play the game as it ought to be played, what *had* been done and what hadn't. In another sphere of life he would have been a scholar, maybe a professor of Greek. Of late years his lore had been listened to by ever-diminishing crowds at the cross-

roads store, like the worn-out lectures of some ancient professor who interests the rising generation no more. But to-night his eyes were shining and shrewd and joyful. For good times, such as existed before the law came in to meddle and take the spirit out of men, were coming once more to the Big Smokies.

He knew both those young men who glared at each other over the heads of the rollicking and heedless crowd; he had known their fathers before them, and their grandfathers, and he knew that they came of fighting stock. He knew they would not "take it out" in looking. Now and then he nodded his head, then went on puffing his pipe and tapping his foot. It would be bright to-night in Dead Man's Field, and the Field lay on the way home for Bud and for Nank and for him.

Once he thought the fight was coming right here in the room, and he rose to his feet like a bearded lion and dropped his pipe into his pocket. He had his rules, his ethics, his ideals. A room full of people was no place in which to start a row. Women would scream and meddle, likely faint or get shot. Then, too, a man who forced a fight in a crowd was usually a blusterer who counted on interference.

The fiddle had stopped, and Phœbe was talking eagerly up into Bud's face, trying, after it was too late, as women always do try, to stop the conflagration she had started. Nank was standing close behind her as if he owned her, though it was Bud's dance—old Bill had kept account of that. Suddenly the fiddler started up, and Nank snatched her from under Bud's very eyes and whirled her into the dance. Bud took a step after them, his face white, his eyes wild; old Bill started forward then. But with the dancers whirling all around him and bumping into him, Bud stopped a moment. Then he turned and stumbled out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

"He'll be waitin' out thar in the yard," said the old man to himself. He sat down once more, puffing his pipe.

Old Bill was the first out when the dance broke up—the first to reach Bud waiting down there by the road, the first to catch and hold him when the oath rang out and Bud reached for his gun and started for Nank, coming out with the rest of the crowd.

"This ain't the place!" he said, holding to Bud's wrist with

a grip that cut, and looking up into his face with steely eyes.

Then Phœbe Abernathy came running through the crowd straight to Bud where he stood, with the old man holding him, just outside the heavy shadow cast in the moonlit yard by a cedar. She had not seen him standing boldly out in the moonlight, as he had been standing when the old man reached him. She thought he had been hiding in that shadow—which was black as ink—hiding in ambush, waiting.

"You coward!" she cried up into Bud's face, her breast rising and falling.

The old man smiled with the cynicism of age and experience. The girl liked Bud and was disappointed; she wouldn't have let anybody else call him that. Old Bill had seen the two of them more than once walking down the mountain roads together, walking very slowly, as if there were no such thing as time.

Her face was white now, and she was sobbing when they dragged her back into the house. Not once had she looked at Nank, who stood in front of the crowd, cool and steady, but watchful. Old Bill knew; she might as well have said: "I love you, Bud!" It would have meant the same thing.

But Bud didn't know. Old Bill had heard him gasp as if the girl had struck him in the face. Bud was young, you see, and didn't understand. The world had ceased to exist for him. Later what she had said would rankle, would drive him mad with rage. But right now, as he stood paralyzed—right now, thought the old man, was a good time to be going.

"I'll look out for these two fellers," he said to the crowd. "I live down below whar they live, an' I'll see 'em home."

A man in the crowd laughed. . . .

Some of the frolickers, strangely quiet now, went part of the way with them, then at the crossroads turned off down the mountain, their talk and laughter beginning again as they passed out of sight. Silently along the ridge road trudged the three, the old man walking between Bud and Nank, his hands in his coat pockets, his pipe in his mouth, his mind running ahead to that moonlit field—that historic and hallowed spot that had rung with more shots and drunk up more blood than any other field in the mountains.

Old Bill wasn't bloodthirsty; he was simply a man with an

idea—the same idea that has been held by philosophers more learned than he: the idea that to fight is the chief function of man here on this planet that whirls round the sun, with the moon at intervals looking down on it and lighting up Dead Man's Field.

Bud was bareheaded—he had forgotten his hat—and he walked straight now, head thrown back, swinging along in the moonlight.

"It's a pretty night," he said after a while in a queer, loud way, and threw back his head and laughed.

Old Bill said nothing; he had seen them this way before when liquor or the love of woman had made them drunk. And Nank said nothing—only smoked a cigarette.

Suddenly Bud stopped in the road, and Nank stopped, and the old man stopped, very watchful.

"I said," yelled Bud, "this here's a mighty pretty night. What do you say, Nank Morgan? Is this here a pretty night, or ain't it?"

Still Nank did not speak, only looked at Bud quickly, viciously, his face white, his eyes blazing.

"Come on," said old Bill, dryly. . . .

In silence the rest of the way they came out into the flattened field at the very top of the mountain range, where the moon was bright as if it were shining on snow. Halfway across the field Bud stopped in the road, and Nank stopped, and old Bill.

"This here's mighty pleasant, now, ain't it?" sneered Bud, "this here walkin' together in the moonshine!" His hand darted to his hip pocket and swept his coat backward. "Git out of the way, old man McCordle!" he yelled. "Draw, Nank Morgan!"

Nank threw away his cigarette.

"I ain't got nothin' to draw," he said. "I got out of the habit of totin' it in town."

"Then, by God, borrow!" yelled Bud.

For a moment the gleam went out of the old man's eyes.

"I ain't got nothin' to lend," he said, humbly. "Things has been quiet roun' here so long, I jus' got out of the habit of totin' mine. Hit wore my britches pocket out. The ol' woman had to keep on patchin' 'em. Things ain't like they used to was," he said in his sorrow.

Then out of the vast storehouse of his knowledge it came—and the gleam of authority shone once more in his eyes.

"Thar's a way," he said, slowly. "Hit's been done."

"Then speak up!" said Bud, his face close to the old man's face, his breath hot. "It's got to be to-night, an' it ain't no fist fight. It's me or him!"

"Speak up, old man," said Nank. "Spit it out."

"Thar's a way," repeated old Bill, unmindful of the interruption. "Yes, hit's been done. Here—gimme that gun, Bud."

He unbreeched the revolver, a heavy old six-shooter, the nickel worn off in spots.

"Hit's a ol' gun," he said.

"Oh, it's good enough, I reckon," said Bud, proudly. "It was Pa's gun—him that died fightin' four men an' brought down two of 'em."

"I know," said old Bill, reverently. "I war thar."

He emptied the cartridges out of the cylinder and held them out in his hand. "Be thar six?" he asked. "Then here goes five!" And he threw the five away far into the field. "An' here goes one back in the gun," he said, and shoved the solitary cartridge into a chamber. He gave the cylinder a twirl and clicked the gun shut. "It may go off the first shot; it may go off the second—it may go off the sixth. An' you don't know, Bud; an' you don't know, Nank; an' I don't know. Only God A'mighty knows, an' He ain't likely to meddle."

He dropped the pistol into his coat pocket and looked at the two men. He waited a moment, then went on:

"Hit goes by the toss of a coin. The man that gits the first toss gits the first shot. The man that gits the second toss gits the second shot—an' so on till the hammer comes to whar the ca'tridge be. Bud Campbell, this here's your gun; you might have settled things here an' now, settled 'em your own way, an' you didn't. Speak up, Bud Campbell—heads or tails?"

A moment Bud stood staring at him—then he spoke:

"Tails."

"So be it, amen!" said old Bill. He took a quarter out of his pocket and held it up. "Betwixt each shot I spin this two-bit piece. If it falls tails, it's Bud's shot; if it falls heads,

it's Nank's. That's the rule all the way through. I may have to spin it one time; I may have to spin it two times; I may have to spin it six times. Nobody but God A'mighty knows; an He ain't goin' to meddle."

Only the amateur hurries through a thing. In all that followed, old Bill was deliberate, grim, impartial. He went out into the field; he came back with two stones, and placed them in the road exactly ten paces apart. Between each shot, or each click of the pistol that told that the cartridge had not come under the hammer, he tossed the coin like the expert he was, then got down on his knees in the road and struck a match above it. He handed the gun to the man who had won the toss, watched him take his stand at one rock, watched the man who had lost take his stand at the other, then stepped to the edge of the road, hands in his coat pockets, pipe in his mouth. "Ready?" he asked each time, and waited for the response of the man who faced the gun. When it came, he took his pipe out of his mouth. "Shoot!" he said, then put his pipe into his mouth again.

The night was cold, and his old blood was thin, but the cold didn't touch him now. As the cylinder brought the cartridge closer to the hammer, and the chances of prolonging the game grew narrower, his movements became even more deliberate, though his eyes shone ever brighter, and his hands trembled a bit now as he stooped over the coin and struck a match. He spun the coin each time a little higher up in the moonlight; he held the match longer above it; he examined the silver verdict closer.

"Say, but this here's fun, ain't it?" said Bud a little wildly on the fourth shot—a shot that came to Nank.

"Ready?" asked the old man.

"Ready an' waitin'!" cried Bud.

"Shoot!" said the old man. . . .

It was on the fifth shot—the coin gave it to Bud Campbell as it had given the two previous ones to Nank—that Nank took off his wide-brimmed hat and dropped it in the road beside him then stood facing the gun, straight and unflinching, his mouth a little tighter than usual, his face a little paler. But Bud was breathing deep, and his voice was hoarse when he spoke.

"Nank Morgan," he said, "you got one chance out of six to

live; you got five chances out of six to die. Is thar anything? Your ma or sisters or anybody?"

"Ready?" broke in old Bill.

And like an echo came the voice of Nank: "Ready!"

"All right," said Bud, grimly, "so be it."

He raised the gun; he took careful and deadly aim—and on his face came a sudden and terrible eagerness. This was the last shot but one. If the gun missed fire this time, it meant for a certainty that the cartridge lay ready for the next shot. He could pull the trigger once more right quick; old Bill was a little deaf and wouldn't hear the first click; nobody would ever know—and Nank would tumble yonder in the road, and he would go home this night and to Phoebe Abernathy tomorrow, conqueror.

"Shoot!" cried old Bill quickly, his eyes blazing.

Bud pulled the trigger; the gun clicked; a moment it remained level while the sweat started to Bud Campbell's face in great beads and his hair rose on his head and every muscle in his big body quivered. Then the gun came down, and Bud stood gasping and choking.

"Here's the gun, Bill McCorcle," he said, and turned away.

There was a dead tree lying prostrate beside the road, a white old skeleton of an affair. He sat down on it, his chest rising and falling, and mopped the sweat from his face. He rose like a tired man when Nank came toward them and looked his enemy quickly and searchingly in the eyes. He saw the grim approval there, the touch of gratitude, of friendliness, of comradeship. He thought for a moment of the nights when he and Nank used to go frolicking together. He had always looked up to Nank. Nank had seen his struggle; Nank knew the temptation that had almost overwhelmed him to pull the trigger just once more, to end this thing, to keep his own life. Neither spoke; there was no need of words; but they stood close together, united by some strange bond, while old Bill got deliberately ready to spin the coin for the last time.

High up in the air this time old Bill tossed that two-bit piece, their eyes trying to follow it as it went out of sight in the darkness. It seemed to stay up there awhile as if lingering, then off yonder a little way it hit the frozen ground with a *ting*. It bounced, spun round, then rolled off into a rut beside the road, as if to hide the secret it held upon its face.

They all bent down now over the spot where it seemed to have run there in the deep rut, while old Bill pulled the dead weeds and grass carefully, tenderly, almost lovingly aside. There was no sound but that of hard-breathing men. Even old Bill's face looked queer and drawn as he struck the match. They peered down into the rut washed full of silvery sand that glistened in the flare of the match. There was no quarter here.

Farther down the road now the old man, his hands trembling, pulled the dead grass aside, struck another match, and looked up and down the shining sand, then still farther, then back, his movements growing more eager, his face worried.

"Spin another one," panted Bud.

"Hit won't do!" cried the old man. "Hit's got to be found if it takes all night."

He struck fire to the dead grass and weeds that overhung the gully and the edge of the road, the flames, tiny at first, then brighter, lighting up their faces like crimson footlights. Bud went back to the log, sat down, and buried his face in his hands. Nank stood beside the old man, watching the flames and the smoke that dimmed the face of the moon now. There came a little impatient puff of wind that caught the smoke and blew it like a pointing finger toward the man sitting on the log.

The fire burned the weeds away, ran off into the rocky field in thin skirmish lines, sending up its smoke that smelled sweet and strangely peaceful. Among the scattered grasses of the field it struggled awhile, then went out. The old man got down once more on his knees, struck a match, and peered up and down the gully.

"Here it be!" he announced.

Bud rose and hurried to them, and once more they all stooped while old Bill held close to the fugitive face of the coin his last match. There was a moment's silence; then Bud staggered to his feet.

"I'm a dead man," he said, and turned away, "—dead an' bound for hell."

He took his place beside the rock in the road, tearing his shirt open at the throat as if the night were hot.

"Hurry up," he said.

"Is there anything, Bud?" asked Nank as he took his place with the gun.

"It don't make no difference now. I've had my fling. Only you can tell my ol' ma it was fair. You can tell—tell Phoebe Abernathy I ain't no coward. That's all, boys. This here's fun, I say. Them's my last words."

Old Bill took his pipe out of his mouth. It had gone out long ago.

"Ready?" he asked.

Yonder the gun came up slowly, steadily. Behind it Nank's face was white as paper.

"Ready," said Bud. "This here's a pretty night, ain't it, old Bill McCordle—moonshine an' all."

"Shoot!" said old Bill, and swallowed hard.

Still Nank stood, pistol level, face like paper.

"Shoot!" cried old Bill and started toward him. "God A'mighty, man—don't stan' thar lookin'! Shoot!"

The pistol came slowly down; strange and quiet came the voice of Nank: "I done *shot*."

A moment the old man stood, uncertain, uncomprehending, wondering if the gun had shot and he had not heard. But yonder stood Bud alive, and there had been no flash of flame from the pistol. Suddenly the suspicion rushed through his mind that even Nank Morgan had lost his nerve and had not pulled the trigger. Then an inkling of what had really happened dawned on him, and he hurried to Nank, the suspicion and the question both in his excited eyes.

"You played a trick on us," panted Nank, his eyes blazing like live coals. "You never stuck no cartridge in this gun. You had us standin' up here thinkin' we were killin' one another. And you——!"

With hands that trembled, the old man snatched the gun away from him, unbreeched it, and exposed the cartridge. "Strike a match!" he ordered. "Hold it close here! I played a trick, did I? See that ca'rtridge? See that-ar dent in the cap whar the plunger hit? See it? I played a trick, did I?"

He counted the empty cells back to the one that lay under the hammer. There were four of them. The old gun that had barked faithfully in many a fight had "snapped" in this—snapped on the second shot.

"That would have been *me*," said Nank.

"It *is* you, young man!"

Old Bill did not speak with resentment; that had left him now. It was just a question of doing the right and fair thing, of seeing through to the end this fight that had begun. He turned to Bud, coming toward them like a sleepwalker.

"Bud Campbell," he said, "this here gun snapped on the second shot. That shot was yours—that shot is still yours. If the gun snaps again, it is still yours—yours till the gun do go off. Hit's the right an' fair thing; hit's the only right an' fair thing."

A moment Bud stood looking down sternly into the old man's unflinching eyes. Then he cried out so loud that the startled echoes came back to them from the border of the silent field.

"No—by God, no! I don't want no shot—fair or no fair! Gal or no gal! Git out of my way; git out of my way with that gun. Nank Morgan—me an' you was raised together, Nank. Me an' you have been to hell together. Here's my hand, Nank Morgan!"

And so they shook hands there in Dead Man's Field, looking into one another's haggard eyes.

"It's all my fault," said Nank. "I didn't have no business buttin' in to-night. She's yours, Bud. She don't care nothin' for me. I ought not to have butted in. I'm goin' back to town to-morrow."

Old Bill McCorcle turned away and shuffled on down the road alone in the moonlight. Back there was no place for him. Young men didn't know their minds any more. The world had fallen on degenerate days. He had been swept aside like the prophets of old by a generation that regarded him not. Behind him lay the moonlit field. Below him the valley and the shadows. A mile down the road he passed the cabin of the Campbells. There was a light in the window. The Widow Campbell was sitting up for Bud. Farther on, he passed the cabin of the Morgans. There was a light in the window here, too.

"Things ain't like they used to was," he said, and shook his head.

But there was a grin on his hard old face as the moonlight fell upon it.

THE JINX OF THE "SHANDON BELLE"

BY R. DE S. HORN

From *Collier's*

THE feud between Captain Amos Waters and the *Shandon Belle* began within five minutes of his first setting foot on her. Surveying with a discriminating glance the graceful lines and smart rigging of his new command, Captain Waters let out a sigh of solid appreciation: "Lady, you certainly are one beauti—" And then, *bam!* a five-pound block, hurtling down from the tracery of spars and rigging aloft, crashed down within six inches of the apostrophizing skipper.

Now, a tackle or rigging block has no more business falling out of a well-ordered ship's top rigging than a planet has shaking out of its orbit. That the *Shandon Belle* was a well-ordered ship, there was no doubting. At the same time, there was no doubting the fall of the block, either. There was the block, and there was the dent where it had landed, staring out of the deck planking like a baleful eye.

Captain Waters proceeded with his inspection with just the slight involuntary uneasiness that such an unpropitious omen would have inspired in any reasonably well-bred New England mariner.

The *Shandon Belle* was a barkentine, almost new, the finest three-master in the entire sailing fleet of the Shandon Shipping Company. She had been built barely two years before to the specifications of Old Man Shandon himself, by whose order she had further been equipped and fitted with a magnificence more usually found on yachts than on cargo carriers. To cap the occasion, Miss Mary Shandon herself, suitably escorted by half-a-dozen hawk-nosed chaperons, had come down from

her fashionable finishing school and christened the *Shandon Belle* as she slid off the ways into the water. As if expressing her appreciation of the honour, the *Shandon Belle* had promptly beaten the best previous sailing record ever made through the canal and slipped through the Golden Gate in a passage time that made her a newspaper item for weeks.

That was before she had taken her cargo. With the advent of cargo on to her decks and into her hold she became a different creature altogether. Cargoically speaking, she simply lay down on her promises. This, too, in times when with her speedy lines and huge cargo space, and with cargoes screaming from the warehouses to be carried at top prices, she should have been piling up profit hand over fist.

What made it worse was that the things that occurred to wipe out her profits were always of the most inexplicably foolish sort: like losing a mast, for instance, in a Mendocino blow that ordinarily shouldn't have started a stick even in a sailing canoe. The fact that the cracked spar proved to be crazily faulty, while it might ease the mind of the captain, didn't compensate the owners any for the loss of time and money, however.

The next outrageous thing she did was, for some indefinite reason, to run amuck of the *Shandon Pride* while running in for the Golden Gate. The reason was indefinite, but the damage was not. The *Shandon Pride* had to go into the yard for some very extensive and expensive repairs that completely wiped out the profit that otherwise the *Shandon Belle's* quick passage would have brought to the Shandon Shipping Company.

And so one thing followed another until one morning Old Man Shandon stumped into his offices, plumped himself down into his chair, and blurted out his disgust to his secretary: "The only thing she hasn't had bought to order, Williams, is a crack skipper! Anyway, now that Benson's quitting her, here's our chance to try that on her. Telegraph to Pliny in Boston immediately and tell him to send out the very best sailing skipper he can find along the whole New England coast!"

Wherefore Captain Amos Waters, originally of New Bedford, reported in one fine morning at the Shandon offices in Pine Street. Captain Waters was thirty, husky, tanned, and

indubitably a seafaring Yankee from one end of his six-foot frame to the other. Old Man Shandon welcomed him with approval, and himself attended him to Oakland Creek to introduce him to his new command.

At his first sight of the *Shandon Belle* Captain Waters was enchanted. He hurried aboard. Three minutes later, as narrated, a hurtling block just failed by inches of cracking his skull, and then and there ending his seafaring for good and all.

Captain Waters, however, was not of a disposition to be lightly intimidated. He went on with his task of getting acquainted with the *Shandon Belle*. When he viewed her cargo machinery he was soothed. When he inspected below, from yachtlike cabins to spacious holds, he completely forgot the incident of the rigging block. Everything was in apple-pie shape. Former Captain Benson had left behind, on quitting, what was indubitably an A-1 ship.

With each new promenade, with each added hour, Captain Waters found some new perfection of form or fitting to gloat over. On the third day he started down the companion toward his cabin. Lovingly his eyes rested on the hand rail—a lustrous piece of solid mahogany.

“Lovely—lovely! The man that built you sure had a heart for beauty! You’re almost too pretty to be true, you sweet, wonderful bit of perfec——”

He jumped; managed to hook his fingers over the edge of the hatch just in time. With a crash the companion ladder dropped from beneath his feet.

Swearing, Captain Waters drew himself up by main strength to the deck above. “Damn the cabinetmaker that glued that thing together! He must ‘a’ used toothpicks instead of spikes!”

Wrathfully he turned toward First Mate Moore as that officer, attracted by the crash, came running aft: “Mr. Moore! What the devil have they been doing to that companion?”

Wide-eyed and bewildered, First Mate Moore stared at the gaping hatch. “Two years that companion ladder’s been in reg’lar use now—an’ that’s the first time any one ever so much as complained of it creakin’ even!”

“H’m-m-m,” said Captain Waters, slowly.

Together they went to examine the wreckage. An out-

wardly sound-appearing timber had parted completely across along a line of invisible grain fault.

"H'm-m-m," said Captain Waters again.

But when inside of two months a tackle on a cargo boom, carrying away, allowed several thousand feet of swinging lumber to come within a fraction of an inch of sweeping him overboard, Captain Waters did more than say "H'm-m-m." He sent for First Mate Moore.

"Moore," he said, speaking slowly and keeping his eyes fixed in elaborate carelessness on the mizzen shrouds, "—er, why was it that Captain Benson left the Shandons to go with the Belden Company? As far as I can see, the Beldens haven't got anything that can equal—or, at any rate, out-class—this packet here."

The mate shook his head. "I dunno. I don't think the Belden Company's got anything afloat with the class of the *Shandon Belle* either."

"You don't—er—remember anything happening, then, that could have made Captain Benson mad at the company—or the ship, eh?"

First Mate Moore was slow of speech and, some said, slow of thought likewise. "No, I dunno as I do, right off. The very day before he left, though, I rec'lect, the gangway slipped and dropped him overboard between the ship and the dock. He was awful mad."

"Humph!" muttered Captain Waters, evidently to himself. "I wonder, now, if that could be the reason——"

First Mate Moore turned perplexedly. "Reason for what?"

"Oh, nothing." Hastily Captain Waters turned on his heel and retreated to his cabin. It is not ethical for a sea captain to allow his subordinates even to suspect that he has misgivings anent his ship.

Four months passed. For a wonder the *Shandon Belle* began to behave herself. She even made money. Lulled into smug complacency by her exemplary conduct, Captain Waters again forgot his forebodings. And so one day off Ano Nuevo, the air being light and there being no possibility of making the Golden Gate before nightfall, he determined to secure something that both he and his owners had been wish-

ful of for a long, long time; viz., a picture of the *Shandon Belle*, up and going, with every stitch set and every sail drawing. Bringing his camera up on deck, he ordered the dinghy dropped overboard, and then called the mate to him.

"Moore, I'm going out in the dinghy with my camera. I want you to bring her up inshore of me where I can get a good light on her. Come right at me until you get real close, and then give her a full and just pass me a dozen feet or so. Understand?"

Over the side went Captain Waters. Setting to the oars, he pulled away until he reached a position where he thought sunlight and ship would coördinate to give the clearest possible effect. Then, boating his oars, he began adjusting his lens and focus.

On came the *Shandon Belle*, canvas gleaming, spars shining, a bewitching little bow wave curling away from her clipper bow. Captain Waters, standing up in the dinghy to get a better view, watched her come. "Mother of Moses, but you're a sight for seagoing eyes! *Belle - Belle--Shandon Belle*—that's exactly what you are! Come on, baby! Come to your daddy—you precious bit of a cargo yacht!"

One last look Captain Waters took at his camera. Then he waved his hand. "All right: ease her off!"

There was no change in the barkentine's course. On she came, straight as an arrow.

Captain Waters frowned. "Ease her off, Moore!"

From somewhere on the *Shandon Belle* came back an unintelligible yell. In her bow the lookout's face was one huge expanse of gaping mouth.

With a startled curse Captain Waters dropped his camera and sprang to his oars. It was too late. One mad chop he made. Then the lunging bowsprit stabbed past his head. The cutwater flashed down upon him, the dinghy jerked and fell, part on either side. Only by the sheerest luck was it that Captain Waters failed to accompany the dinghy. Just as the bowsprit lunged past he had leaped. His clawing hands grabbed at the martingale; found it. For a second he hung, kicking, between wind and water. Then he worked his way inboard.

Aft at the wheel, First Mate Moore and two seamen were

tugging frantically at the spokes. Captain Waters went aft roaring: "You damn chucklehead! Whyn't you bear off when I told you? Are you trying to get my ship from me by the murder route?"

Great veins of exertion bulged on the mate's forehead. "No, sir. The—wheel's jammed! She won't budge an inch even for the three of us!" Captain Waters laid hold of the wheel. He might just as well have been tugging at a battleship's cable.

"Dadblast the blankety-blankety thing!" he swore. And then with a suddenness that almost threw him on his head the wheel flew free under his hands. The *Shandon Belle's* head whirled around so far that her jibs fluttered.

Captain Waters stood for a second astounded. Then he grunted: "By Jiminy, I'm going to look into this thing here and now!"

From wheel spoke to rudder they followed every inch of the steering gear, looking and feeling. Nowhere was there so much as even a twist or a chafe to give reasonable excuse for a jammed helm.

For the third and last time Captain Waters cleared his throat: "*H'm-m-m!*"

Into Oakland dock the *Shandon Belle* glided. The lines went out; the gangway dropped to kiss the wharf. And then Captain Waters went below. When he returned to the deck he brought with him a small leather suitcase. Carefully he set it down in plain view of First Mate Moore.

"Mister Moore," he said, bluntly, "I'm going up to the offices to tell them that I'm not skippering the *Shandon Belle* any longer. Four times she's tried to get me, and four is enough! At the same time, if I can't manage one of the Shandon ships, I'm too proud to ask for another. But I'll be glad to put in a word for you——"

Reaching down behind the wheel, First Mate Moore hauled forth something leathery and black. It might have been the twin to Captain Waters's own suitcase.

"No, sir, Cap'n. I want a ship, all right, but I don't want one bad enough to want this one. She's been stickin' to captains, but there ain't no tellin' when she may start in on mates. When you come out of the offices after you resign, Captain Waters, you'll most likely see me just goin' in!" . . .

Off Carmel, at night, in one of those drenching California fogs that the real-estate boosters so casually forget to mention, the Belden ship *Kongo* stole northward. The same giant breath that had rolled the fog bank down and over her was bearing her blindly on her way. Blindly, but not dumbly; her foghorn was hooting raucously. Near the wheel Captain Waters himself stood, staring anxiously into the crowding mist. "Whew-w! Reg'lar Cape Cod weather!" he vituperated. "Hi, there, Tierney! Bring her up a quarter point!"

The *Kongo* was not the only blind voyager in that reeking veil. On the port bow a steamer's whistle was whooping hoarsely. A small sailing craft in the fog astern let out a ghostly wail.

"Heaven help the poor shipowners on a night like this!" growled Captain Waters. "Hello! what's that?"

The unseen steamer's whistle was yelping madly. Mingled with the shrieks were the lusty yells of a foghorn. Other ships joined in the uproar. Apparently the *Kongo* was surrounded by a dozen liners and schooners.

"By Jiminy, I wouldn't mind a bit if it was the *Shandon Belle* I had under me now instead of the *Kongo*," muttered Captain Waters to the fog. "I could git out of trouble quicker if I got into it with that yacht. That's one thing I'll say for her: she certainly handled like a Glo'sterman almost! Suffering cats, there's another one!"

From somewhere close aboard a foghorn was wailing; the sound seemed to come now from the bow, now from the stern. Suddenly from out the fog directly abeam a ghostly shape broke. A bowsprit lunged out toward the *Kongo*, a vessel's hull took vague shape beyond.

Captain Waters gave one frantic yell, half whirled toward the wheel—and then the crash came. And with it, darkness. . . .

The first impressions of Captain Waters' returning consciousness were an intolerable stuffiness of atmosphere, a total lack of visibility, and a severe hardness of whatever he was lying on. "'S funny," he ruminated aloud. "It ain't my bunk I'm in: I can tell that by the crick in my back. But if it ain't my bunk, then why the devil am I sleeping here?"

He started to sit up, with the intention of investigating. A shooting pain that immediately tore its way through his

brain caused him to abandon the idea. He lay back with a surprised grunt. Putting his hands to his head, he discovered just at the edge of his scalp a huge tender lump. By feeling further he discovered what it was that shut out the light and caused the stuffiness. Above him, around him, shutting him in like a shroud, was a thick heavy cloth. Through it at intervals he could feel the protuberances of tangled cordage and splintered wood. Also he realized that water was gurgling somewhere at hand. A faint ghastly wheeze came to his ears. "Holy smoke!" Captain Waters started with returning recollection. "That other boat must 'a' run us down. And I'm pinched under the wreckage! Hi, Moore! Tierney!"

There was no response; nothing but the wheezy gurgling. Captain Waters grabbed for the jackknife he always carried in his pocket. Tugging and hacking, he finally tunnelled a way into the fresh air. For a second he sat and blinked foolishly. The grayness roundabout gave evidence that the night had lapsed into day, but still the fog wraiths hung like murky curtains. Their thin veils became cloaklike at a few yards' distance. In that few yards, however, Captain Waters saw enough to set even his seasoned heart to jumping fiercely.

His own ship, the *Kongo*, familiar of plank and spar and shroud, was lifting sluggishly beneath his feet. At every heave the air and water wheezed in and out through her crushed side with an ominous mournful sob, like a whistling buoy groaning to the swells. Still jammed into the wound was the thing that had given her the deathblow: the crushed prow of the stranger from out the fog. Shattered side and crumpled stem mingled in one mass of wreckage; the *Kongo's* topsail and the stranger's jibs were as one. Beyond, the masts and hull of the other ship shrank back into the fog as though she sought to hide her identity. Like two grim giants locked in a death struggle, the two hulls creaked and strained against each other.

Most ominous of all, however, was the sense of loneliness. No human form moved in the blurring mistiness, no human voice broke the silence. Only the two ships ground and gurgled.

"—Moore! Pierce! Tierney——!"

There was no answer.

Captain Waters sprang across the sloping deck; thrust his head down a companionway:

"Moore?"

Dark, swirling water spat up at him. Captain Waters drew back to the comparative cheerfulness of the fog outside.

Empty boat davits gave the clue to his searching eye; mutely they explained the unanswered calls. At the same moment Captain Waters became aware of another intimation speaking louder than words. The sluggishness with which the *Kongo* had been lifting to the swells became an almost complete cessation of movement.

"Gone! All gone! And time for me to be going, too!" While he grunted Captain Waters jerked at his shoes. Delaying only to slash loose a dangling bit of broken spar, he went over the side.

Grabbing on to the bit of spar that was floating quite near, he paddled out into the fog, taking frequent backward glances over his shoulder. When the two hulls barely showed as one blur in the mist he ceased paddling.

"Now," he said grimly, his eyes fixed on the blur, "if it's got to be, let it be!"

A couple of minutes passed. With his arms over the spar, Captain Waters waited watchfully. A drifting fog wraith settling down to the surface suddenly shut out the dim blur altogether from his vision.

From behind the fog pall came a long, sobbing wheeze—another one—a creaking, crackling noise—a ghastly gurgle, ending in a grisly *whooo-o-oooshh!*

Captain Waters pronounced a brief requiem: "Good-bye, *Kongo!* You were a good ship, even if I have seen better."

He struck out for the spot whence the noise had come. Again the fog wraith shifted, this time upward. Captain Waters gasped: "For the love o' Mike! Ain't you gone yet?"

Vague but unmistakable, a dark shape hung in the haze. Something gave the impression that it was shorter, smaller than before. Also there was now no grinding, groaning noise emanating from it.

"What the devil! Am I seeing things—or didn't ye both go down together?"

Cautiously Captain Waters approached the blur.

It was a ship, indubitably. Black and reeking, she reared

out of the water. Captain Waters' eyes fell upon crumpled strakes, gaping bow, and tangled sails and spars sloping into the sea toward him. "You damned murderer! So it was you that stayed up, was it?"

His glance took in the gaping, sneering bow, the sheer of the strakes as far as he could see. "Blest if I ain't coming aboard you—you look like you're good for hours yet!"

A trailing stay gave him passage aboard. Along the empty decks he sloshed, staring about with a critical eye. "Empty davits—so your crew up and beat it, too, did they? Well, considerin' the hole in your bow and the way you were clamped onto the *Kongo*, I don't know as I blame 'em, either. Only they oughter stuck by close enough to watch you go down, seems to me—reckon the fog must 'a' shut 'em out and they couldn't find you again, though."

All this time he had been working aft. Near the mizzenmast he stopped with a hoarse grunt:

"*You infernal son of a gun! So it was you that—— But gosh dang it! I might 'a' known it would be you!*"

The *Shandon Belle* indeed it was. The *Shandon Belle*, listed, leaking, with a hole in her bow and her jibs over the side—but nevertheless the *Shandon Belle*. Captain Waters recognized familiar spars and hatches with ever-increasing rage. "Followed me up until you got me—didn't you, you simpering slaver! And you got me out here alone—just you and me—haven't you? Well, go to it! Go to it, and see who knuckles under first! Do your dam'dest, you blighted hunk of timber!"

Wrathfully he set about constructing a raft. The raft made, he looted the cabins for clothes and the galley for provisions. Piling this salvage on the rough raft, he called the *Shandon Belle's* attention to it.

"There, ye Beelzebub—see that? Now sink, darn you, sink!"

The *Shandon Belle* made no reply; not even a gurgle.

Sullenly Captain Waters strolled about, glancing down hatches, peering into holds, even hanging over the side in an effort to estimate the amount of lost freeboard.

"You're slow about sinking, ain't you?" he demanded, wrathfully. "Well, sink you must, sooner or later; and it's me that's going to watch and grin when you do it!"

Back he stumped to his loaded raft. Sitting down on it, he drew forth his pipe and filled it with tobacco which likewise had come from the *Shandon Belle's* cabin. He struck a match vindictively.

"All right, old lady: I can stick it out as long as you can!"

Belligerently he sat and puffed. Thicker and clammier crowded the fog. At varying intervals, depending upon the pipe's cargo, he went around and examined the ship's condition. The *Shandon Belle* seemed to be possessed of a satanic malevolence in the matter of delaying her sinking.

From somewhere forward, through the fog, a steamer's whistle coughed hoarsely. Again it came, and again, anxious, inquiring. With a sudden cry of rage Captain Waters stood up and stamped on the deck.

"Now I know what you're up to, you crabbed sister of Satan! You ain't satisfied with one ship murdered; you've got to take more down with you! And if it was a passenger steamer it would fair tickle you to death almost, wouldn't it? Well, ye won't—not until you get rid of me first, anyway, you won't!"

The *Shandon Belle's* foghorn lay where it had been abandoned when the crash had come. Grimly Captain Waters sat himself down to his self-imposed task.

Throughout the long clammy day he stuck to his post while over and around the gray mist hung like a drenching smoke. Onward the *Shandon Belle* drifted, blindly, only the barest surface draft cooling her sodden sails. Shrieking steamer and hooting schooner slipped by in the murk. In reply Captain Waters sounded the *Shandon Belle's* horn, as a sailorman without a timepiece can, at almost the proper intervals. And with each blast he execrated the ship he stood upon:

"You harpy! You scum of the back channel! If you was a decent ship, you'd 'a' sunk long ago!"

Only with the first faint evening breeze did the haze lift and give the signaller surcease from his signalling. Tired and worn, Captain Waters stumped slowly forward and lighted the *Shandon Belle's* running lights. Then cutting away all canvas but enough to give him steerage way, he lashed his helm fast for the night. One last look he took at the broken bow and the amount of water in the forward hold.

"Huh—you look like you could stay up till Kingdom

Come! But I won't trust you, you lying, indecent piece of junk!"

Curling himself up on his uneven raft, he lashed himself loosely to one of the timbers that constituted it. "Now sink in the dark if you want to," he grunted. "I'll be safe, anyway!"

It was but a fitful sleep that he drowsed into. He squirmed uneasily; low, nightmarish groans broke from his lips. The *Shandon Belle* with him aboard helpless had left her rightful element. She was sailing through the clouds, past the stars, into a region of eternal darkness. No need for him to ask her destination; she could be bearing him to but one port. Already he could see through the black void ahead the great, gleaming, malevolent red eye of Satan himself.

So real was the dream that he sprang to his feet, wide-eyed, crying.

Out of the darkness before him, not a hundred yards away, a great red eye was glaring.

He threw both hands before his eyes. Slowly and carefully he drew them away. The red eye still glowed ruddily. And then it seemed to him that beyond and above the glowing eye he could glimpse the faint outline of towering sails.

Springing to the rail, Captain Waters lifted his voice in a joyous hail: "Ship ahoy!"

Through the night came the answering hail: "Ship ahoy-y! What ship is that? And what d'ye mean, coming down atop o' me when I've got the right of way?"

Captain Waters laughed happily. "This is the *Shandon Belle*. And I'm in distress!"

Instead of the expected solicitude, there was a loud yell from the other craft. "Hey? *The Shandon Belle*?" Then the yell became an urgent roar: "All hands on deck! Cap'n Benson! Cap'n Benson!"

"The *Belden Lass*—or I'm a landsman! And with Billy Benson in the cabin!" grunted Captain Waters, gripping the shrouds impatiently.

From the vague mass beyond the red light came an uproar, a wild confusion of clatter and cries. The mad medley ceased by magic as a voice gruff with authority rang out:

"What ship did you say that was?"

"The *Shandon Belle*," barked Captain Waters, irascibly.

"And I'd thank you to send a boat crew over to me right away!"

"—Didn't I tell you, Captain Benson? Didn't I tell you?" It was the first voice of the night that broke in excitedly: "It ain't natcheral! I wouldn't go in that boat for a million dollars a minute!"

"Shut up!" snapped the voice of authority. Again it addressed itself to Captain Waters: "Who is that speaking?" "Captain Waters—Captain Amos Waters of the ship *Kongo*!" roared Captain Waters. "Are you going to send that boat—or ain't you?"

There was blank silence for a second. Then from the *Belden Lass* came the amazed and incredulous pronouncement: "The *Shandon Belle* went down in collision with the *Kongo* early last night: we have the survivors aboard with us now! And Captain Waters was knocked overboard and drowned in the collision!"

"It's a blankety-blank lie!" shrieked back Captain Waters. "This is Captain Waters hailing from the *Shandon Belle* now! And if you don't hustle a boat over here right away, Billy Benson, I'll have your ticket away from you as soon as I reach port—so help me Joshua, I will!"

Into the colloquy broke a new voice, a voice whose every intonation was as familiar to Captain Waters as the knuckles on his own hand. "No, sir. Tierney told me the captain was standing right there when the *Shandon Belle* hit us. And we couldn't find the slightest trace of him afterward!"

Captain Waters fairly dented the shrouds with the fury of his clutch as he screamed into the night: "Moore! You pop-eyed walrus! So it was you that left me lying under the blankety wreckage, was it? If you don't pile over here right away with a boat and a half-dozen men, I'll come over there and break every bone in your cursed body—do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir." There was no longer any hesitation in First Mate Moore's tones. "That's him, all right, Captain Benson."

But Captain Waters, when the relief boat scraped alongside the shattered barkentine, was distinctly of another opinion. "Fetch me off? Like h—l you will! Come aboard here, you lubbers, and man those pumps! I'm going to sail this blasted garbage lighter into port!" . . .

From the dock, to which he had had himself hastily driven at the first inkling of the arrival, Old Man Shandon yelled delightedly: "Fine! Great work, Captain Waters! I told you New England was the place to find real skippers, Williams! I say, Captain Waters: come on ashore, and we'll talk over the salvage."

"Salvage? *Salvage?*" yelled back Captain Waters, forcefully. "Salvage for this rotten old scow? Why, she ain't worth the trouble it'd take to tow her out and sink her!"

"*Scow? Sink her?*" Old Man Shandon gasped. Then his face grew purple. "My ship a scow? My lovely *Shandon Belle!*"

Captain Waters interrupted him with a savage glare: "Shh-h-h-h-h! Can't you haul a hatch over that line of talk till I get ashore—huh?"

Old Man Shandon's mouth gaped. Williams, who had come down prepared to resist to the utmost Captain Waters's extortions, was even more bewildered.

Down on to the wharf dropped Captain Waters. Still scowling, he led the way up the dock, the shipowner and his secretary following mutely in his wake. Only when he was well away from the pier and around the corner of a large warehouse did Captain Waters turn. The scowl had disappeared as if by magic.

"Mister Shandon: I quit your ship once without giving you any reason. So now that I've brought her safe into port again I'll leave it to you to allow me any salvage that suits you—providing for one thing: You've got to give the skippering of the *Shandon Belle* back to me! If you don't, I'll sue you to the limit of the law!"

Anxiously he awaited the answer.

Old Man Shandon stared at him, blinking. "I—a minute ago you were calling her names—saying she wasn't worth sinking—and—and now——"

"Yeah, I know, I know!" hastily interrupted Captain Waters. "But that was in hearing of her. It's something I oughter known all along, but I only found it out this trip. Ships is just like women, and you've got to treat 'em as such!"

"But, for the love of Mike——" Old Man Shandon's eyes grew wider than ever. "What's that got to do with the *Shandon Belle?*"

"Plenty," responded Captain Waters, tersely. "She's one of those high-stepping dames, just like her name indicates. And you can't flatter them ladies without spoiling 'em. The minute I began to cuss the *Belle* and treat her rough she came through like a blue blood. But rough treatment's what she needs, and it's what she's going to get if I have the say-so. *Now, do I get the job of skippering that low-down slabsided piece of washtub—or don't I?*"

HIS SACRED FAMILY

By HELEN R. HULL

From Harper's

WITH little swirls of sound released from durance—bodies pushing upward, feet thudding decorously, hymn-book pages fluttering—the congregation rose for the last hymn. Constance gazed ahead, the corner of her mouth lifting in a faint curve as her only outer recognition that Lynn's thumb pressed hers under the cover of the hymnal.

"Sun of my so-ul, Thou Sa-a-viour dear——"

Constance did not sing. She heard, above the gray din of voices near her, the voices of her mother and John Barse, clear streaks of colour over the ruck, her mother's voice green, water-clear, John Barse's purple, like deep water. By moving ever so little toward Lynn she could see the choir loft, see her mother, a design in black and white. Triangles. Her white, pointed face, the long triangle of white net where her broadcloth jacket was pushed open, even a triangle of passive white hands. Queer that high-and-clear green shimmer could come from a design in black and white. She could not see John Barse; the shining pink baldness of Lynn's uncle, two seats ahead of her, roundly obscured John. That was like Lynn Holt's family, she thought, to shut from sight whatever they did not like. They were disturbed by John, for all he was Lynn's cousin and part of them.

Her mother was singing well to-night. Constance's thoughts escaped the slow rhythm of the hymn. "That's because she is defiant at what I said." What was her mother seeing from the choir loft? Constance wondered whether those neat proper backs had prying, hostile eyes. Everyone is talking about it, Lynn had told her. You should speak to your mother! My mother thinks so. She is terribly in-

discreet, at least, seeing so much of John. Can't you drop her a hint? Constance sighed. She had dropped the hint, clumsily, just before her mother started for church. Her mother had laughed, and started down the stairs to where John Barse stood waiting for her. Then, halfway down, she had called back, "I told you if I sang in church there would be trouble, Connie. Be sure you grow fat! That's the real cause of their disapproval, all those good women! Don't stay young when you are nearing forty! Slim hips are a deadly sin, aren't they, John? And you're marrying into the Holts, Connie! Grow fat and respectable. That's your mother's advice."

Lynn drew the book from her hand. The voices had ceased, and the church was full of subdued movement and murmuring.

"Shall we wait for your mother, Constance?" Lynn held her coat for her, without the fleeting touch of fingers on her shoulder.

Constance shook her head. Without glancing at him, she knew just how he looked—his blue eyes worried, his sandy brows pulled together making one deep, abrupt wrinkle at the bridge of his nose, even his sandy hair somehow more erect and agitated.

"I hear your cousin is leaving us, Lynn." As they moved toward the aisle the seal coat in the pew ahead of them had turned. "We'll miss his voice in the choir. So nice to have him singing the few months he's stayed." Constance caught the quick dab the woman's eyes made at her. "He'll be missed in many ways, Mr. Barse will."

"Yes. He is going abroad. Business." Lynn cleared his throat.

Constance wanted to run, to thrust her way violently among the sleek, fur-draped figures, and escape. Her impulse edged her to the door in advance of Lynn, so that she had to stand for a moment on the steps, waiting for him. Her heart was beating dully; she could feel it under her chin. Oh, she had only imagined that the people were staring at her with curious eyes! Only read into casual glances the malice of that message from Lynn's mother, Madam Holt.

"You were in a hurry!" Lynn took her arm, and they

went silently along the village street, the shrill squeak of dry snow under their feet.

"Dear Lynn," thought Constance, as the pulse in her throat slackened to the steady rhythm of their walk, "he's so honest it's as if he lived in a glass shell, and I could see into his very self." She glanced up at his square shoulder, his profile faint in the half light of the street, and suddenly she hugged his arm. His face swung around above her.

"You're not cross, then?"

She laughed. "At you? Oh, Lynn!"

"Wow!" He let out an explosive breath. "That's good."

"I know your mother made you promise to say that."

"Well." He hesitated. "I think there's some basis——"

"Don't let's argue about it again." Constance pressed her shoulder against his arm. "Such a little way home! I'd rather just love you."

"Anyway——" They were at a corner, where the street light made crisscrosses of shadows from the bare trees, like a net into which they walked. "Anyway, John is leaving town to-night. That ought to stop the talk."

Something in Lynn's square chin shutting on his words fired the girl.

"Why doesn't your mother blame him? Why is my mother to blame? We just were kind to him, a stranger, your cousin."

"I wish he'd never shown his face here! Your mother's a woman, and older, that's why——"

"Oh! Oh!" Constance drew away, rigid, from his arm. "They just waited till they had a chance to jump on her, all the old women in this town! Because she was pretty and different—and hadn't grown up here—and——"

"Constance, that isn't fair!"

"They've never liked her—any more than your mother liked me! Oh, I know! She sent you away to college to forget me! You are a Holt—and I? Nobody!"

"See here, that's all done with! I didn't forget you, did I?" Lynn stopped, and with a quick movement swung Constance into the circle of his arm. "We're going to get married next month, aren't we? And Mother does like you. And I—Connie!"

For an instant they stood there. Constance felt his words blown warm on her forehead; she peered up at his familiar, substantial shape massed darkly against the distant light. She shivered.

"Yes, Lynn." They went on quickly. "Sometimes I'm scared, I'm so happy. Scared of your mother as I used to be when I was little. Scared to be so happy—— Maybe that's why. . . ." She laid her cheek briefly on the rough sleeve. "Let's not talk about it any more!" She slipped her gloved hand into his, and relaxed again into her thought, "Dear Lynn! Dear."

The house was dark. Lynn unlocked the door, turned on the light in the narrow hall, and kissed her soberly. "Good-night. You're tired. I'll call you up to-morrow."

"Lynn!" Constance moved her fingers along his sleeve. "Let's run away, just you and me. Let's——" She pulled herself to tiptoe against him. "A desert island, no folks, nothing but us!" She shivered; perhaps the cold night air from his coat. "There are so many people here!"

"Silly old dear!" Lynn kissed her again, and for an instant she clung to him, her eyes closed. "They don't matter to us."

"You mean that, Lynn?" Constance stood away from him.

"Well, of course other people have to be considered."

"Oh, literal Lynn! I mean in the you and me part of life. No one outside of us could touch that—for me."

"You don't think anybody could touch my love for you!"

"Sometimes I am frightened. There are so many—your mother, your important relatives, your business. Oh, I'm bad and jealous of them all!"

"I guess you know where my heart is!" Lynn drew himself up so seriously that Constance's intensity dropped into a soft laugh.

"Yes, I do!" She pulled off her glove and pressed her hand against his breast, her fingers burrowing into the rough wool coat. "Right there, under my hand!"

He lifted her hand, and laid his lips on her wrist, a soft, devouring kiss, under which Constance felt her pulse singing for a moment of delicate, tender happiness.

"Don't forget that!" He moved reluctantly to the door. "Good-night, dear."

"Good-night!" and Constance heard him crunch briskly along the walk. She heard other footsteps, and turned to run up the stairs, her softness gone into a hard thought, "Lynn wanted to hurry away! He was afraid they would come in before he had gone!"

In the upper hall she waited, her toe rubbing over the worn place in the runner, catching the coarse threads of the warp. Everything was shabby! Yes, John Barse had come in. She retreated toward her door at her mother's "Ah, Constance must have sent her young man straight home. That's good. Come in, John."

Constance closed her door softly. "I'm going to bed," she thought. "Mother's wound up. She'll only make fun of Lynn if I am waiting for her. As she does when she is—upset. To-morrow John Barse will be gone. And in a few days Father will be home." She was slipping her dress down from her shoulders, and stopped, as if her thought had brought her father visibly to the door. A little man, with bright, restless eyes, a nervous high voice, a constant, artificial manner of cheerfulness. He was on the road most of the time, salesman for retail-store supplies. Clearly she could see him, running a hasty tongue over his lip, rubbing his hands—that awful, deprecating good-humour! Poor Father! Constance had a queer flash of understanding. He brought his salesman's manner home, trying hopefully to "sell" himself in the face of her mother's shifting, uncertain moods.

"She's so much cleverer than we are," thought Constance, "and unhappier, too. Brrr, I'm cold." She hurried into her bathrobe, and sat in front of the chintz-covered dressing table, brushing out her soft dark hair. "I look like Mother, a little——" Her hands drew the flying cloud into smooth bands, framing the pale oval of her face, and she leaned forward to stare at her reflection. Gray eyes under long lids, short, wistful upper lip—it was a serious face except for the whimsical upward fling of the fine, dark brows. Impatiently she rose, her fingers moving quickly down the braid. "But I don't feel like her!"

When she had turned off the lights she hesitated a moment at the window before she let the shade spring up. Sometimes she was afraid of the pines outside! There they stood, the long, pointed black row, the nearest rising past her window.

Lynn's pine trees. The corner of the Holt estate touched her father's lot—no, was divided from it by the wall of pines. For years Constance had looked out at them each night, and sometimes through their dark masses had caught golden flickers of light from the windows of the Holt house. Only last fall that nearest tree, after years of straining toward her window, had reached it, touching it with a faint, slipping sound. She had been wakened by that touch night after night, until one night, when the fall rain beat down the pine smell and the wind drove the needles, she had leaned far out, trying to break the branch. She remembered her panic when, slipping, she had just caught herself against the sill and had lain there, the rain in her hair. She had tried to tell Lynn about her feeling. "I think they hate me! They stand between us! I think that tree tried to pull me out!" Lynn had laughed and said, "Silly girl! Pines have to grow." But he had told his gardener to trim the branches.

To-night they were very black and still, except for patches of old snow caught in the boughs. Constance could see no lights. "Lynn is sitting in the library," she thought, "talking with his mother. He is telling her that he did as she asked. Told me that my mother was making herself conspicuous with John Barse, his cousin, a man years younger." She shivered. "I won't think that! I'll think—how surprised the pines will be to see me living on the other side of them in that great house." With a little rush she pushed the window high and flew into bed, the frosty air sweeping after her with the cold, clean, dark smell of the pine needles. "Dear Lynn!" She curled a hand under her cheek and slept.

A sound, faint as smoke, drew her abruptly out of sleep. Like a cry! She fumbled for her bathrobe. Still drowsy, she pushed her door open and clung to the balustrade, peering down, brushing a hand across her eyes. At the end of the hall, indistinct in the light which blurred through the portières from the living room, stood her mother and John Barse. "He's going," thought Constance. "I just heard them talking." But as she turned something in the quiet, rigid opposition of the two held her. Then her mother laughed.

"Afraid?" Constance shrank from the vibrant voice.

"I am not afraid!"

"Then come."

"There are other things besides fear to keep me."

Constance could see her mother lift her hands in a gesture implicit with struggle. John had not moved.

"Perhaps you think that next week or next month I shall not love you."

"Do I care about that! *Now* you love me!"

"You will come with me, Amy. So easy! Just walk out of this door with me to-night. The boat sails at nine. Tomorrow there'll be ocean between you and all this you hate so. Europe ahead of us, love——"

"John! I can't! I would only make you unhappy. And here—there is Constance."

"You've given your life to her. Now she has her Lynn. That's all she wants. She's not like you! What have you if you stay?"

"No, I won't go. I'm old!" She flung her arms wide, swaying backward, as if she fought against a vortex which was drawing her down.

"Old! You?"

Constance, straining wildly forward, saw him move between those wide-flung arms, saw his dark head swoop downward, and could look no more. Her breath hoarse, she closed her door softly—as if they would hear her!—and stumbling on the cord of her bathrobe, felt her way toward her bed. She heard a thin wail creeping under the door and then expanding, filling the darkness, her mother's, "No! No! I can't!"

She crept into bed and hid her face. She pressed her palms over her ears until the blood pounded like slow drums.

Her mother! And she had laughed at Lynn. She had said, "My mother is fine. You don't understand her. She is generous and reckless about—silly things. People don't like her here. But she is all fine, my mother."

And John Barse! She had been afraid of him, when he had first come, last fall. He was like Mrs. Holt, Lynn's mother, more like her than her own son. Dark, lean, a kind of fierceness—his hooked nose and dark sharp eyes seemed wrought by his own spirit. Just as Lynn's mother made her

feel. All her life she had stood out against Lynn's mother because she had loved Lynn. Now when that fight was won—Lynn had won, through his steadfastness, and Mrs. Holt had given in—this man had come.

Constance sat up, trembling. She heard no sound except that of wind rising and the pines moving in long, sharp swishes outside the window.

"Mother's always been unhappy." She could see the dark gesture of a frown. "But this is wicked! She can't run away—Mrs. Holt would hate me again. John is part of her family. And Lynn——"

She pushed aside the covers, thinking, "I must go down. I'll tell them it is wrong. John will laugh. Mother—she would listen to me."

She heard the door close with a sharp whine. She flung herself up on her knees. Slow, heavy, her mother's feet climbed the stairs, dragged past her door to the end of the hall. Constance pressed the blanket against her lips, stifling the choking cry. Her mother had not gone!

The night was bewildering, like a sluggish stream with drifting flotsam. The past floated along with jagged bits above the surface and the rest submerged in sleep or oblivion. Constance and Lynn, children, playing under the pines, his mother calling him home. She always called him home. Constance in the stormy rebellion of fifteen, crying out, to her mother, "Well, Lynn says everybody thinks it's crazy for you to stand on a bridge and watch sunsets! Why aren't you like other mothers?" and her mother's reply, "So you want my sunsets, too, Connie? You'd like me to play bridge—not stand on one, is that it?" Lynn, her mother, her father, Lynn's mother—half-forgotten things—drifting along.

In the morning Constance stood at the head of the stairs, reluctant to go down. She was tired. The night clung to her like a heavy cloud.

"Oh, Connie!" Her mother stood below her, slender and crisp in green gingham. "Hulda wants your laundry. Bring it down, will you?"

At the foot of the stairs her mother took the bag from her hand.

"Hulda says we spoil you, letting you lie abed!" How

clear and hard her mother's voice was! Last night couldn't be real, thought Constance. "But I told her that soon you would be living by system, rules, clockwork—everything we haven't in this house. And Hulda agreed. 'Let the pore thing sleep out,' she said. 'She'll have to get up betimes when she moves in with the old Madam.'"

Constance looked fleetingly at her mother. Hadn't she cared at all! Her lips were colourless and her long white eyelids had a nervous fluttering, but the girl's glance could find no sure note of tragedy.

"I didn't sleep well," she said, awkwardly.

"Your coffee is perking. I'll give this to Hulda."

Over her breakfast Constance heard her mother's voice, light, unemotional, giving directions to Hulda. With a faint resentment she felt that she had been dragged off a peak of intensity down on to the level of commonplace daily life. She never knew just what lay beneath the surface with her mother. Well—Constance stretched a little, into comfort. Good rolls. Her mother couldn't have cared seriously and be so ordinary this morning. Everything was all right. She could think about Lynn—or read the morning paper. She propped it against the percolator.

The clock on the mantel began to strike, its sweet, hurried notes tinkling nine o'clock. Then the hall clock sounded, deliberate and harsh. Constance lifted her eyes. Through the doorway she could see her mother standing in the hall, her face turned away. Something rigid in the straight, slender green figure caught at Constance's throat. Her first thought, swift and irrelevant, was about the green dress. Her mother liked soft, flowing things of chiffon; that gingham was a concession to Constance's sense of morning propriety.

She saw one hand waver out and close about the edge of a step; she saw the cords of the white throat tauten into harsh, ugly lines. Nine o'clock! John Barse sailed at nine.

Constance shut her eyes until that clock had dragged to its ninth stroke. When she looked again, her mother had moved beyond the line of the door. The girl sat for a long time, motionless, her young mouth growing stubborn under her wide, pitying eyes. "There's nothing else she could have done," she thought, at last. "And there is nothing I can say to her. Nothing."

She heard the postman's shrill whistle, and immediately after, the opening of the front door. Her mother had been here in the hall all this time.

The door swung open.

"A note for you, Connie." Her mother flicked it to the table. "And a letter from Aunt Paul. She wants me to come for a few days."

Constance lifted her eyes from the sheet of gray paper with its sprawling, uncertain old writing, to her mother's face. Her voice had dropped into a low vibrancy, disturbing. Her eyelids fluttered down over brilliant, dilated pupils.

"She's not sick?" Constance fumbled in the dark. Just the old aunt who had brought up her mother. What had happened?

"Not exactly. She's old. I haven't seen her since summer. You know——" Her mother rolled the sheet over a finger. "I think I'll go. You don't need me this week. The dressmaker isn't coming till next Monday."

"Why don't you?" Constance turned away, ostensibly to hang the checkered towel on the rack. "It would be a change." If she goes to Springfield she can get used to his being gone—the girl's thoughts darted at the relief—and I can get used to knowing!

"Yes, it would." Under the sudden intent gaze Constance's eyes filled with tears. Another instant and she would have cried out, "I know all about it. Don't hate me because you gave him up! You couldn't have gone." But her mother added quietly, "Well, then, if you are sure you don't mind, I think I'll go this afternoon."

Just after luncheon, as they waited for the taxi, Lynn telephoned. Did Constance want to go to a movie after dinner?

"I don't know. I want to see you."

"You all right, Constance? You sound tired."

"Yes. I just thought I might like to stay here. Would you mind?"

"I should say not. Say, Connie——"

The clamour of the doorbell broke in on the whirl at her ear.

"Oh, Lynn! I'm sorry—got to go—the taxi's here."

"Where you going?"

Constance smiled. That was one of Lynn's silly and adorable jokes, that loud, dominant air of possession.

"Just to the station, Mister. With Mother." Silence. "Oh, Lynn, did you hear?" From the door her mother's voice, "Coming, Constance?" "Lynn! What was the matter with that wire?"

"Your mother is going away?" How blank and heavy his voice sounded.

"Yes. Just to Springfield. I'll tell you to-night. Good-bye——"

As she stepped into the taxi beside her mother she felt her face grow warm, and she stared uncomfortably through the dusty window. He hadn't liked it! Suspicious—of what? She twisted her gloves between her fingers. She had not thought of that. He meant that it looked queer, her mother's departure. As if she were running away. Not with John! He had gone. Just to hide——

"Your young man all right?" She felt an undertone of excitement in her mother's light words.

Then just a moment on the station platform.

"Shall I wire Aunt Paul you are coming?"

"Heavens, no! A telegram is the yellow peril itself to her, old dear. I'll 'phone her from the station."

"You'll be back before Father, won't you?" The cold winter sun touched her mother's face into luminous pallor; no sign of years there, except perhaps the faint crinkling at the outer corners of her dark eyes.

The train rumbled past them.

"I suppose so. I'd like never to come back." Mrs. Sprague relinquished her bag to the porter. "But I don't like Springfield, either, do I?" She smiled at Constance, a hesitant, wistful smile, and the girl bent toward her, half breathless, expectant. But the porter shouted, "All 'bo'd," and with a faint shrug Mrs. Sprague set her foot on the step.

"Good-bye, dear," Constance lifted her face, and her mother's lips trembled briefly against hers. Then with a rush the woman vanished into the car. Constance had a last glimpse of her moving along the aisle, a blurred impression of the white curve of her cheek against the long, drooping feather.

Lynn came in rather late and apologetic.

"Mother got to talking—but you said you didn't want to go out, anyway, didn't you?"

"I don't care. Brrr! You're cold." Constance slipped out of his arms back to her seat under the lamp. She gathered her sewing into her lap, soft gray silk, with a patterned border of small, transparent beads. Her fingers made flashing, uncertain stabs among the tiny, slipping beads.

"Nice picture, Connie!" Lynn's wicker chair crackled as he settled himself near her.

Constance fumbled with a bead that wouldn't slip over the needle. She saw uneasiness in the way he swung his foot; she knew that if she looked up she would find that abrupt, harassed wrinkle between his sandy eyebrows. With a faint sigh she pushed away the box of beads; they rustled like water.

"What is it, Lynn?" She shook out the silk, glancing at him over its shimmer.

"That's good. Put it away. You never pay any attention to me if you sew. What's that?" He turned his head quickly, at voices somewhere in the house.

"Hulda. She was expecting her sister to come in."

"Oh." He sank back. "It sounded—like your mother."

"Scarcely." Constance was curt.

"No. Of course not."

The moodiness Constance had fought all day swirled again around her. I won't talk about Mother, she thought. I won't! She sought hastily for something.

"Shall I get that curtain stuff to-morrow? I'm going into Boston, I think."

"Oh, yes. I meant to speak of that." Lynn pulled his fingers along the arm of his chair, stopping to snap a loose end of wicker. "I meant to speak of it."

"Doesn't your mother like the samples?" Constance asked quietly.

"She thinks they are pretty, very pretty. But——" He gave his upper lip an extra twist over the words, a grimace of embarrassment. "She wonders whether it is wise to change the colour scheme. For temporary quarters, you know. It would look startling from the outside. Right next her parlour windows. Sort of bright, don't you think? If we were going to live there always——"

Constance's white lids dropped over shining hostility.

"If you care about them—I mean, if they make much difference—I thought just curtains, you know——" Lynn stammered.

"Just curtains, of course."

"Another year, in our own house——"

"Sometimes——" Constance tried vaguely to stop the words, but out they pushed—"sometimes I think next year can never come. I think I am trying to marry your mother, not you at all! I think——"

"Constance!" Lynn jerked forward in his chair.

"To-night, as I waited for you, I thought—his mother is talking to him. Something she doesn't like. Some day it will be me she doesn't like. And Lynn will say, 'Just my wife, of course. If you don't mind, Constance——'"

"Constance, that isn't fair! It's not like you, Connie!"

Constance flung up her hand to hide quick tears, and Lynn with a lurch of his chair was close to her, reaching for her hand.

"Constance, look at me!" His face wavered, grew enormous, then blurred; as the tears rolled down her cheeks, his blue eyes were clear again, disturbed, steady. "That's my girl. You know better than to talk that way. Go get the old curtains. I don't care if they do look queer outside."

"It's not curtains." Constance gulped. "It's always something, and she has her way."

"Now, Connie." Lynn's grasp was warm and firm about her quivering fingers. "You know I just want her to be happy. But I love you!"

Constance was sombre.

"Suppose that some day—her being happy meant that she didn't want me to marry you. What then?"

"Stuff and nonsense." Lynn shifted uneasily, and Constance saw his eyebrows bulge over his frown. "Now, take these curtains. I gave in easy because she was worried. That's all. She's not so young, you know, and she has set ideas."

"What was she worried about?" Constance felt a shiver contract her skin like a cold breath. "No, tell me! I think I know."

"She didn't like your mother going away. Not to-day."

"What business is it of hers?" Constance pulled her hands violently from Lynn's grasp.

"She didn't like the looks of it."

"How does it look?" Constance was on her feet, her own anxiety running as fuel to her anger. "How does it look for mother to go to Springfield to see Aunt Paul?"

Lynn rose slowly, his face flushing.

Constance stared at him, her eyes dark.

"You see!" she cried, softly. "They don't matter to us, but they make me say things to you. Oh, Lynn! We've waited so long. We'll wait too long!" She was clinging to him, her face on his shoulder. "Lynn, take me away! Tonight. Let's not wait—until it's spoiled."

"There." His arms held her close. "You're just kind of tired."

Constance sighed and looked up at him. She could see him struggling for words, comforting, banal, easy words.

"I've got to go off for a few days, too." His hand touched her hair gently. "When I come back you'll feel better, what?"

"Where, Lynn?" Her hand clutched at his sleeve.

"Connecticut, Philadelphia. Factory business. Got to see some of the directors."

"Lynn!" Constance stretched up, her arms about his neck. "Lynn, take me with you!"

For an instant, as he held her there suspended, she felt she had driven herself through him, like fine wire. His lips were harsh against hers. Then his arms grew slack.

"How could we, Connie?"

"I don't know! Any way! The town hall—where do people get married in a hurry? They do!"

"We couldn't." His voice was stern, as if his own brief flame had alarmed him. "It would be foolish, with everything planned. Undignified."

"Yes. Foolish." Constance moved away from him, her arms limp at her sides. "It would look queer." She laughed.

"You shouldn't suggest such things." He followed her, but she would not lift her face. "I might do it!"

"No, you wouldn't."

"Well, someone has to have some common sense."

"I wonder. All these years I've loved you, Lynn, common

sense has sat right on my love! Holding it under—so it couldn't grow. We've waited so long—for common sense."

"Constance, dear!"

"Oh, I know!" she broke into his protest. "I'm unreasonable. But I am afraid—we may wait too long."

"But it's only two weeks now, Connie. Good Lord! do you suppose I don't want you?" He seized her shoulders; Constance felt his cheek on her hair. Suddenly she was laughing, softly.

"There!" She choked a little. "Poor Lynn! I'm bad to tease you when I know—it wouldn't do."

"Is there something back of this—you're worried about?"

"No. No sense in it." Constance sighed with laughter. "Kiss me, Lynn, and run home before I disgrace myself—any more."

When he had gone she stood for a time where he had left her. The reading lamp threw softened light on her face making a strange mask, catching in relief on all the oblique, downward planes of chin, cheekbones, eyelids. And the mask was fear.

Presently Hulda's feet clumped up the back stairs. Constance stirred, bent to turn off the light.

"I am foolish." Her lips formed the words deliberately. "Nothing is wrong. John Barse is miles out on the ocean. Mother is with Aunt Paul. And Lynn—why, Lynn just kissed me and went home. I won't be frightened!" Her voice was a thread of defiance in the darkened room.

Two days later Constance unlocked the door and let herself into the dark, empty house. It was Hulda's afternoon and evening out. Constance let her packages slip to the floor as she reached for the letters on the hall table. Mrs. Henry Sprague. That was from Father. Miss Constance Sprague, from Lynn. Not very thick! And a third, in the black, abrupt writing of her mother. She would wash off the city grime and have the letters for company at her solitary dinner.

Lynn's first. Just a note. He had decided to leave the Pennsylvania trip till later. Part of their wedding tour. They could stop at Philadelphia on their way South. So he would be home earlier than he had expected, perhaps as soon as his note. With haste and much love, Lynn.

Constance let her finger tips rest against his name, and her

eyes dreamed a little. Dear Lynn! How foolish she had been, that evening, bothering him.

As she ran her finger under the flap of her mother's letter, she noticed the postmark. New York. Hastily she drew out and unfolded the sheets.

DEAR CONSTANCE:

Whether or not I deserve a hearing, I mean to ask for one. I didn't intend this. Not now. I meant to wait until you were safe from any effect of my actions. I should have known that the Holt tribe was so numerous that nowhere could I escape them. And now that I have been seen, I might as well go on. You yourself will admit I am done for.

I honestly thought John had sailed that morning. I fought all night, minute by minute, until it should be nine o'clock. If I had known in time I might have fought a little longer. But how would you act if you went to your execution, and found your head still on! His letter came too quickly after I thought I was through. He had cancelled his sailing and come on to New York. I could reach him until Wednesday, when he would leave.

What I planned in all sincerity was just to see him once more. It seemed so plausible, with Aunt Paul's letter right there. I thought no one would know, and I could then grow old and die with one golden day in my life. I thought it couldn't harm you. That little hotel seemed safe enough. And then to see old Mamie Barse and her dried-up daughter staring at us! No way to shut their mouths. You have heard the scandal before this reaches you, I know. So you see I might as well go on with John. I can't be sorry. Not for that. I am sorry it happened this way.

I'll write your father. It won't make much difference to him. I know he'll divorce me decently, so I can make John an honest man. And when you have married Lynn, you may forgive me for loving. I meant to go away as soon as you married. I have tried, Connie, to stay respectable as long it would touch you. Don't let them bully you about me. Disown me! I want you to be happy, too——

At a sound in the hall Constance lifted her head slowly. She stared through the doorway. That slender figure, rigid, groping with one hand for support, the taut agony of denial in the line of throat and head! The figure moved, blurred, came toward her. Not her mother. Lynn, hatless, his sandy hair bristling, his upper lip twisting grotesquely about his words.

"Good God! What a mess!" He strode toward the table, opposite Constance. "What a frightful mess!"

"You've heard so soon," Constance's words were distant, wondering.

"Heard! All the relatives in town are at the house powwowing! Worst scandal the family ever faced." He dropped into a chair, his hands clapping violently on the table. "How could you, Constance! Telling me—why, you said they were just fools, the women, talking about her. You meant my mother, too! And all the time—you even helped her get away."

"Oh!" Constance stared, her fingers rubbing over the pages of the letter. "You think that?"

"If you had only told me!" Lynn ground one fist into his other palm. "I could have stopped them. Your mother! My cousin! Why, the town will never be through talking about it."

"What affair is it of theirs? Or ours?" Constance pushed unsteadily to her feet, and retreated slowly until she had backed against the window. She couldn't breathe, sitting there. Outside was the slip, slip, slop, sl-slip of snow melting, dripping from the great pine trees. Lynn had risen, his face brick red.

"You think it's all right, then! Fine!" He strode around the table toward her so abruptly that Constance moved her hands to her breast, palms outward, in a faint gesture of protection. "That's what you meant the other night! About going with me—you knew this would come out. You wanted to be safe."

"Yes, I knew this would happen." Her white eyelids folded down, shutting out his angry, bulging eyes. "I didn't know just how. That doesn't make any difference. You don't have to marry me. You're quite free. I couldn't marry you! Live in the house with that old woman, your mother! Hear her thinking! Like a hawk, circling, waiting for a chance to pounce. She would say to you, 'What can you expect of the daughter of such a woman? Blood will tell!' Oh, she has already said that to you! I can see it." Constance had seen; just a flicker of admission in the midst of his fumbling, confused anger.

"You sound as if we were to blame! As if we ought to be ashamed instead of——"

"You think I should be ashamed? You'd like me to cry and be humble and . . ." Constance turned away; the winter night, beyond the window, seemed to lay chill fingers

on her cheek and throat; she heard the slip of the melting snow beneath the pines. "You'd better go, Lynn," she said, quietly. "Go tell them, your mother and the rest, the town, that you aren't going to bring that woman's daughter into the sacred family."

"I haven't asked you to break the engagement." Lynn retreated a step; his truculence had a note of bewilderment. "I felt you hadn't played fair."

"You didn't even have a doubt, did you?" Constance was motionless; only her voice reached out, living, with the leaping rhythm of a flame. "You didn't wonder what I felt. You were sure. Listen, and I will tell you how I feel. Not ashamed. I have done nothing. My mother—for years I have seen her made wretched by talk; by what people said of her. Because she was different. Gossip! Before she married she sang on the stage, and so she must be—well, you know what they have said in this little, cruel town. And—of this I am ashamed—I have been on the side of the town, critical, trying to make her over, until I built a wall between us. I might have helped her. I didn't. I think she has gone now as much because of things that people said as because she loved John Barse. Your mother! The Holts are important, aren't they? It was such a pity you should take a fancy to me! But perhaps I wasn't like my mother. That was what they said, wasn't it? And I wanted people to think that of me. I wanted to be circumspect and conventional and respectable. But I loved you. I thought you were just and fair and fine. Then I began to be afraid. I was growing up and I did not know it. My fear was truth, and I have seen it for the first time to-night. The town has made you like itself. You don't know what I mean, do you?" Constance faced him. "You came to-night, believing all they said of me. All the worst. In spite of love. Your mother has won out."

"It isn't what she said! It's you, Constance! What you've said and done. If you can explain, for God's sake, do it! Instead of standing there talking as if I'd done something." He tugged at his collar, thrust his hand violently over his hair.

And Constance, standing so close to that abrupt gesture, had a strange moment. Her self had fled. Her hands, her

lips, her throat, her breasts, were sentient, conscious beings, things of will and aching memory. Her hands wanted to touch his face, to feel the firm, warm, familiar contour, to pull him down, down, until her lips had their way beneath his mouth, hard, demanding. Her hands had floated upward, fingers curling in their intensity, when he spoke again. With his voice her hands stopped, clenched against her heart, and slowly, reluctantly, her self gathered up and integrated all those separate, clamorous wills.

"You must see that I was justified. Do you think I wanted to believe you had tricked me? That you could lie? Suggesting that we run off! Maybe you thought that would sidetrack attention from your mother. What else can I think?"

"Nothing else." Constance's hands drifted down, empty of desire. Her eyes strained with queer wonder; could this be Lynn! This harsh, flushed face, with the twisting cruel mouth! "You must believe what you like." Her voice lagged.

"You can't explain, then?"

"I could explain and explain, and you couldn't hear my loudest word, because other voices make such din between us."

"I don't believe you ever loved me! Acting like this!" Lynn seized her wrists, swung her arms out in a wide arc. Constance swayed away from his rough breathing, away from his jerking eyelids.

"Let me go! Believe that, too, if you can!" She fell back against the window frame as he released her. "There's no use talking. Go tell them you are free. You don't have to marry me. Let them say—of course he wouldn't marry her! Taking her into his family after what happened! Good riddance!"

"I haven't asked to be released."

"You want that, too! That little sop—to your pride." Constance laughed, her soft, wistful upper lip a thin line of crimson. You may have it! I won't marry you. Now go home!"

He wheeled and started across the room. His coat brushed a letter from the table. He stooped mechanically for it. Constance's hand pushed against the cry which quivered

at her lips. Was it her mother's letter? If he should read it! But with an abrupt motion he tore the sheet across and the pieces fluttered behind him. One whirled to Constance's feet. "With love, Lynn." His own note. Then she heard his steps scrunching into the soft ice as he hurried past the house.

She slipped to her knees, her head against the window sill. Outside the slip—sl—slop came more infrequently, as the night grew colder. Suddenly the clock on the mantel whirled and hurried its tinkling strokes. Nine o'clock.

THE HORSE OF HURRICANE REEF

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

From Short Stories

THE mares are for whoever is man enough to take them," retorted Jean Abadie from the bow of the barge which the towing launch was shoving into the mud shoal on the bay side of Île Dautrive. "Rojas has given them up. The white stallion killed his son, Emile, four years ago. No man of the camps around the bay will land on this reef; he has a name, that wild white devil!"

"You see, M'sieu Lalande, it is not stealing," added Pierre as he stopped the motor and looked at the stranger in the stern seat.

"It is stealing," grunted Joe Lalande, "else why do we come under cover of a storm to rope the colts and mares? Well, no matter. Once we get them aboard and up to the Mississippi plantations, I will show you something, you shrimp-seine Cajans. Throwing a rope, eh? Over westward they never yet showed me a horse I could not break."

The two seine-haulers from Sanchez's platform looked at him doubtfully. "Over westward," to the men of Baratavia Bay, began at the dim marsh shore and stretched to infinity. A native never ventured so far; out there anything might be possible. But no man had faced the exiled king of Dautrive reef. Pierre muttered again how they would get the young mares—they would first shoot the white stallion. It was the hurricane month; they knew well enough that an obliterating sea would come this week over the dunes and marshes. Old Rojas, living with his grandchildren, orphaned by the white brute's savagery, on the far west point of the island, would never know what happened to the five mares and colts. More

than once the gales off the Gulf had left the shell-beached *chênaies* far up the bay strewn with the dead cattle of the people of the reefs.

The big Lalande laughed as he followed through the salt grass to the first low dunes. "Shoot him! You'll shoot no horse with me! You say he's so bad; show him to me! I'll rope and load him, too, my friends, or he will finish me. If we lift Rojas's animals we take 'em all."

The Cajans laughed in nervous disbelief. Lalande, a native, also, who had returned this season to haul seine in Sanchez's company, might have been a great man with the pitching broncos he told of, but Rojas's great white stallion—well, this boaster would see! The brute would allow no seine-crew to land on Île Dautrive; they told of his charging upon the fishing skiffs clear out to the surf line. Sanchez, the boss, had shot him once as he fled to his lugger, leaving the bleeding stallion to rend and trample an abandoned seine.

Grandpère Rojas, in his camp across the shoal depression that cut through the reef, had never tried to reclaim the wild mares and the colts of the white stud's breed. The generations of them lived on the coarse reef grass and the rain pools; an oysterman had no use for horses, anyhow. His son, Émile, had tried this foolish experiment of raising horses on the reef, and given his life under the stallion's hoofs. *Grandpère* had shrugged and let the breed go wild; yet, as Lalande muttered when Jean and Pierre proposed to use his skill in lifting the younger animals, the horses were his to the scrawniest colt. But Lalande had come. He would show these shrimpers; and even if they only roped and dragged the least unruly to the barge, Lalande could break them and Pierre sell them to the plantations. Yet it was horse stealing. Lalande would not gloss that over, but something else had drawn him here—the stories the islanders told of the white stallion's savagery.

"Old Rojas's son, I will be the avenger," he grunted, sullenly, and came on the day Pierre had chosen for the secret raid.

Abadie had stopped in the sandy trail broken through the mangroves to the top of the sand ridge. "*Bon Dieu!*" he whispered, pointing. "His track, Lalande! Big as a bucket! *Eh, bien!* I'd rather face a hurricane than this white tiger!"

Lalande had stepped out in the open sand patch. From

here the dunes fell away to the Gulf beach. Already the sea was rising. Between Dautrive and the outer bar curious, oily currents were twisting in unwonted directions, and beyond them the surf broke in white, serried teeth gleaming against the black southeast. The sky was ribboned in black lines streaming northerly; the wind came in fitful smashes against the mangrove thickets and then seemed sucked up to howl in the writhing clouds.

"There'll have to be quick work," muttered Pierre. "I tell you this is bad, this sea. We waited too long, M'sieu Lalande. We better be back across the bay, and try for the colts another time."

Lalande's gray eyes narrowed surlily. He straightened his powerful figure above the wind-slanting bushes. The two shrimpers had seemed to skulk in their protection. Jean peered down the spray-driven shoreline.

"If we can work one of the yearlings back to the bay side, get him into the mud and tall grass, M'sieu Lalande could use his rope."

But Lalande had gone down the other way. He was out in the open. They howled at him. That was no way to do it! They must stalk the colts. Nothing could be done if the leader of the wild band saw them—unless they killed him first. He would charge a man on sight, he would wreck a boat in the shoals.

Lalande was laughing, whirling his lariat over the mangroves. "I see the mares, Jean! They are crossing the ridge back of us. Getting out of the wind. The big white devil, there he is, eh?"

The two other raiders had crept back through the brush. It was disconcerting to find the animals crossing their trail behind. "If he smells a man he will never let up on us, Lalande," muttered Jean. "Kill him, then!"

The white leader had crossed the trail of the raiders. He turned, broke through the brush, and gained the ridge forty yards from them. Lalande could see him now against the black skyline very plainly. A tremendous brute towering above the others, his shaggy mane flowing backward in the wind, his muzzle outstretched, his neck tensed until the powerful muscles bulged the satin skin. He was suspicious; he stood there a challenging figure to the storm, but his eyes.

were roving watchfully into the thickets as a tiger scenting prey.

Lalande glanced back. His comrades had slunk below the mangroves. They were brave, hardy men of the hurricane coast, but the evil name of the sea horse of Île Dautrive seemed to hold them nerveless. The horse was coming on along the top of the ridge slowly crashing through the brush with alert glances right and left. His pink nostrils quivered, his iron-gray tail raised and swept in the wind puffs.

"They will shoot," muttered Lalande. "If he trails them the cowards will shoot." And he stepped more in the open, and then shouted, "Come, thieves, let the colts go! I will need you on the throw-line to check and choke this brute!" Breast-high in the windswept thickets he was laughing and coiling his rope. This was a foe for a strong man who boasted!

The great horse suddenly upreared with a neigh that was like the roar of a lion. No man had so much as ever put finger on him; he had beaten the brains from one, broken the leg of another, and smashed two seine skiffs in the shallows for invaders. He had been the lord of the reef. Now he reared again and again as he plunged through the mangroves watching for the fugitives as a cat would a mouse under a flimsy cover of straw.

His satiny flanks were toward Lalande; apparently he had not yet discovered the man behind him in this hunt for the others. And then, out of pure panic as the white stallion broke near him, Jean Abadie fired. Lalande cursed and sprang down the slope of dunes after them. He knew he would need their help when he roped this horse; it was no starveling cayuse of the Texas range. But he saw now that the two islanders were skulking for the boat in the last fringe of the mangroves. They would never make it; out in the open the white stallion would crush them both ere they covered half the marsh grass, unless, indeed, they killed him.

The brute saw them now; he swerved in a tremendous rush below the man on the higher sand. Lalande was whirling his rope, and when he heard the hiss of it through the air he laughed, for he knew the throw was true.

"*Eh, bien*, devil! You and me!" He went down sprawling, seeking a root of the tough mangroves to snub the line. He caught one, then it was jerked out; and he went trundling

and rolling over and over through the sands hanging to the lariat. He might as well have roped a torpedo. The horse was in the open now rearing and bucking, but with his savage eyes still on the fugitives. They were floundering through the water. Jean was jerking the mooring-lines from the barge, and Pierre poling the launch back from the swamp grass. The stallion was surging on with the line cutting deep in his neck, but they could not see this in the welter of spray he threw in his charge.

Joe Lalande was on his back in the high grass, bruised and dizzy from his ride on the throw-rope. It was lying out taut through the grass; and for a time the man did not stir. The stallion was plunging somewhere out there, still implacable with fury to get at the shrimpers. Then Lalande heard the first throb of the motor. They were getting away, leaving him, then? They must think him killed—a good end for a braggart who would rather fight the stud than steal the mares!

He lay in the grass listening, without even resentment. The wide reach of the bay northward was flecked with white surges rising between those curious oily bulges of water, the first stir of the creeping tides which come upon the Gulf shores before the hurricane winds. Lalande remembered enough of his boyhood among the island folk to know that. Pierre was right: they had waited too long for this week of storm to raid Rojas's wild horses.

He crept around on the jerking line. Above the grass billows he saw the brute. He was whirling madly in the shallows fighting this strange, choking clutch on his neck. Then he charged back up the dunes, and Lalande barely had time to lie out on the line ere he was dragged again. But when the stallion plunged into the thickets, no human strength could hold. He felt his fingers breaking in the tangle of rope and roots, his face ground into the sand and pounded by showers of sand from the brute's hoofs.

Lalande staggered to his feet presently, cleared his eyes, and followed a crashing trail over the sand ridge. Northward he saw the launch rocking its way across the pass with whip-like streamers of wind hitting the water beyond. Everywhere the coast folk would be debating whether to quit their platform camps and take to the luggers or trust to the oaks of the

chênaies and their moorings. The hurricane month, and a sea coming up past Cuba! Île Dernière had vanished under the waves; La Caminada gone with six hundred souls; these were traditions of the coast, but the natives knew what a hurricane tide meant on the low, loose sand islands that fringed the Louisiana swamps.

Lalande paused on the highest ridge. There was that sullen glisten of the sea, cut through with patches of white, and the green-back horizon gaping to east and west and blotting out with gray squalls. The great wind had not come yet beyond these first squadrons. The big man shrugged as he regarded it. The hurricane tide was shoving frothy fingers out over the shoals. Across the sandy stretch westward he could just see the shack camp of *Grandpère* Rojas on the highest ridge of Dautrive. A few ragged oaks showed white against the sky. The old man ought to be leaving with his orphaned grandchildren, taking his stout oyster lugger and making for the solid land fourteen miles north across the bay.

"It is no place for little ones," muttered Lalande in the Cajan patois. "These people never will leave quick enough before the storms. I can see the old man's lugger still riding behind the point. He is a fool, old Rojas, afraid to put foot on this end of the reef because of the white stud, but stubborn against the sea which comes like a million white horses."

He went warily on the crushed trail. That throw-rope would foul somewhere in the mangroves; that stallion would choke himself to a stupor, for not all the strength in the world can avail against lungs bursting for air. Then he saw the mares. They were huddled in a hollow of the dunes, the colts about them as if confused, uncertain, their shaggy coats ruffled in the wind. That wind was moaning now, high and far; not so bad here on the reef, but striking in slants on the sea as if the sky had opened to let an arrow loose. A hundred miles away as yet, that Gulf hurricane wind, but mounting; sixty, eighty, a hundred miles an hour—a hundred and twenty-five in the bursts that presently drove the sand dunes into smoke.

The rim of wet sand beyond the dry, hummocky space was covering with sheets of black water racing from the surf line breaking on the shoals.

And here Lalande saw what he had sought. There was the white mound in the ripples. With a cry he dashed for it. The horse was down. He had not thought it would come so soon. But the end of the trailing rope had fouled a great driftheap, and the brute had kept on charging and fighting until he choked and fell in the first wash of the sea. The slip-noose was bound to cut him down if he kept on hurling his weight against it, Lalande knew.

He wished he had seen the last magnificent fight against it on the sands; but now he walked quickly around the fallen brute, and knelt to touch his distended, quivering nostrils. The eyes were shut but bulging under a film. The great sides were heaving, a rumbling groan found escape somehow; it was as if the mighty heart was breaking with a last throb against this mysterious power choking its strength away.

"Eh, soldier!" whispered Lalande, and felt high on the horse's neck.

A sudden apprehension took him. Perhaps the thong had killed the renegade? He did not mean that; he was filled with a great exultant joy in this savage. He had stalked and subdued him alone! He stood above this outstretched, trembling body in the first sea ripples, laughing.

"Come, boy! The fight's not done yet! Not the end yet." He twisted his fingers into the taut rope, forced on the dragging driftwood, and eased the tension bit by bit. The rope was buried in the white skin; he worked hurriedly, fearing it was too late.

"Come, come; this will not do——" he was whispering into the stallion's tense ear, fighting at the rope. Then came a fierce, convulsive blow, an explosive sigh, a struggle, and the stallion lay quiet again. He was breathing in great, resurging sighs. His filmed eyes opened slowly. Lalande kept on patting his muzzle while he hitched the noose into a knot that would hold but not choke again. He did not know why he did this, only it seemed fair. He was looking close into the brute's eyes which were beginning to glow with sense again; and to withdraw the choking hitch seemed only justice.

Lalande stood up and looked down at the white stallion. The water was roaring out there now. The skyline was blown white as feathers. The mangroves were slanting; and he suddenly realized that the wind was hard as a plank against

his cheek. Not bursting, but steadily lying against the land. There was no rain, yet the air was full of water streaming in white lines through a growing darkness.

"Get up!" he shouted. "The sea is coming. This is no place to be! Comrade, on your feet!"

And the great horse did so. First plunging up, but with his haunches squatted in the water as he looked slowly about. Then to all fours and standing with his tail whipped about on his heaving flanks. He seemed watching that wall of blown water from the Gulf. Watching steadily, undaunted. The sands under the racing froth seemed trembling; one could hardly see the mangrove dunes not a hundred yards away.

Lalande swiftly turned his eyes from the ridge at a sound. It had seemed a shriek above the other tumult. Then he leaped, and the wind appeared to lift him above the shaking earth.

For the great stud was on him. Upreared above him, a shaggy hoof coming not an inch's breadth from his skull.

Just a glimpse of those red, savage eyes; and the impact of those huge feet almost upon his own. Then Lalande ran. The hurricane wind flung him onward, but he could hear the rush of the white stallion. The entangled rope checked the charge only enough to allow the man to hurl himself into the first mangroves, crawl under them in a whirlwind of rising sands, and keep on crawling. When he stopped he knew the horse was crashing in the thickets hunting him. He saw him as a wraith against the sky, plunging his head low to ferret out his enemy, blowing explosively and hurling the tough mangrove clumps aside.

Lalande kept on his stealthy crawl. He lay, finally, in a water-riven dusk under the lee of the dunes, listening. "*Dieu!*" he panted. "I said, a soldier! The hurricane could not stop that hate of men!"

For half an hour he did not move. The brute had lost his trail. And when Lalande crawled to the top of the dunes he could not stand. All over the weather side the sea had risen. It was white. White, that was all he could say. And the wind? It did not seem a wind, merely a crushing of one's skull and lungs. When he tried to turn away it threw him headlong, but he got to his feet on the northerly, lee side of the sand ridge and fought on.

The sand was dissolving under his feet, and now he saw the water of the bay streaming by him. The inner marshes were gone; the hurricane tide was on, and sixty miles inland it would rush to batter on the cypress forests and the back levees of the plantation lands. Lalande had no illusions about Île Dautrive—he had been a lad on this coast—but he kept on, for the highest ridge was at the western point. Across the sand shoal, beyond this point, was still higher land, a clay fragment in which grew a few stout oaks. By these Old Rojas's camp had stood. It did not stand there now, thought Lalande. Nothing built by man on the reef would stand. *Grandpère* and the children of the man whom the white stallion had killed must certainly have taken to the lugger—escaped before the hurricane tide rushed upon the flimsy shack. Surely, yes. Rojas was no fool!

Lalande kept on, clinging to the thickets when the worst clutch of the wind was on him. The roaring of it all was so steady that actually he seemed in a great silence; as if a new element had enveloped him, a normal thing, this shock and unceasing tenseness of feeling and of sound. Through it he strode steadily himself, a strong man with neither fear nor curiosity—a mere dull plunge on to the last foothold of that reef which was churning to gruel behind his steps. He could not miss the point; there was no other spot to reach, and the hurricane was guide as well as captor.

And his mind was upon the lord of Dautrive Island. "He will go. Perhaps he is gone now. And the mares and colts, all off the reef by now." And a grim satisfaction came that the white stud had turned on him at the last. It was fine to think of. The savage had not cringed. "I do not want anything that can be stolen," he murmured, and spat the sea spray from his sore lips. "His mares and colts, he fights for them—that devil!"

And he began shouting profane, fond challenges and adulations to his conqueror somewhere in this white chaos of a night. A whipping wisp of scud was that charging shape above the torn thickets; any single shriek of the storm his trumpeted challenge in return. Lalande boasted to his soul that he was seeking his foe; if it was the last stroke of his hand he wished it raised to taunt the white, oncoming devil.

Even the storm glimmer had faded when he felt the water

shoaling from his armpits to his waist. This was the west point, the highest; and here, with hands locked to the stoutest of the mangroves, he would have to let the sea boil over him as long as a strong man could—then go.

On the western high point at last, and nothing to see, nothing to feel but the submerged bushes and the earth dissolving so that he had to keep his feet moving to avoid each becoming the centre of a whirlpool.

"It is a storm," Lalande grunted. "Two white devils on this reef." He remembered seeing spaces of mirrored calm, peaceful coves over which they told him orange trees had bloomed in cottage yards of the reef dwellers. The sea had devoured the islands in a night, dug the hole, and lain down in it like a fed tiger. Lalande, crowded closer to the stouter thickets, put out his hand in the dark. He touched a wet, warm surface, heaving slightly.

The skin of a brute. He smoothed the hair in the rushing water, felt along. A wall of steely flesh broadside to the tidal wave. Lalande softly slipped his hand over the huge round of the flank. The water was swirling about them both—to the man's armpits now. Lalande knew. They were on the highest point, but ahead lay the shoal pass. The sea was eating away this point; what was left was sinking, flicked off into the meeting currents around Dautrive and swept inland. The island would be silt on some cane planter's back fields forty miles up the Mississippi delta within the week.

But for the last of his domain the lord of Dautrive was fighting with his last foothold. The white devil of the sea was doing what man could not do. Lalande laughed in the blackness. The stallion could not feel his soft touch in all that beating welter of sand and débris churning around him. He rested his arm across the unseen back—the brute would think it was a driftwood branch. The man stepped forward. There was no other foothold now, it seemed. He reached his hand to the shoulder, up to feel the stiff, wet mane. He laughed and patted the bulged muscles.

"We go, you and I," he grumbled. The mangroves were slatted out on the tiderush, tearing loose, reeling past them. "Eh, friend? The last——"

And then he knew that the horse had whirled, upreared

in the blackness with a scream of fury. Lalande sprang to the left, into deep, moiling water.

He felt the plunge of his foe just missing him once more. But another body struck him and then was whirled off in the meeting tides. He collided with a colt in the dark; and now he guessed that the white stallion's breed had been gathered on the refuge shielded to the last by his huge bulk against the inexorable seas.

They were gone now. There was no more foothold on Dautrive either for the exiles or the man who had come to subdue them. Lalande knew he must not go with the tidal wave. It was death anywhere out there. The water would rush fifty miles inland over the battered reefs. So he fought powerfully back to get a handhold on the mangrove thickets through a whirlpool of dissolving sand.

But the man could not breast those surges through the dark; he felt himself driven farther back in a tangle of foam and débris, and suddenly came a whip-like tightening about his legs. He was dragged under and out across the current until he fought down to grasp this thing that had him.

It was his throw-rope, the new and heavy line that he had brought to conquer the white stud that the island men feared. Lalande plunged up and along it. The rope was tight and surging athwart the drift. When he got his head above water he knew he was clear of the disintegrating sand point, overwhelmed by the rollers in the pass and stung by the spray, but moving.

An unseen guide, a mighty power was drawing aslant the inshore tide. Lalande hauled along until he felt the rhythmic beat of the stallion's stroke; along until he touched his flank. When he could put his hand to his long mane Lalande laughed. He hung there, and felt the brute plunge higher at this contact. Once, twice, and then the stud settled to his fight.

The lord of Dautrive could not shake him off nor rend him with teeth or hoof. He was being ridden through the blackness and the sea.

Lalande began shouting. He could not resist that impulse of defiance, the great horse had been merciless to him on the island, so now he howled at him whenever he could keep the salt water from his teeth.

"*Eh, bien!* Big fellow, you see I am here! If you go, I go! Lalande is with you—devil! Fight! Fight on; a man is on your back at last. A last ride, too, white devil!"

For he had no hope of anything except to be battered to a pulp by the driftlogs and wreckage in the pass or drowned over the flooded marshes. But the stallion would not give to the northward tide, always he kept fighting to windward and westerly. When he plunged on these tacks Lalande swung out straight over his back, but clinging lightly and calling his taunting courage to the brute.

"The west ridge," muttered the rider. "He knows that—the oaks and the clay soil. If anything hangs together in this sea it will be that."

So he clung in the dark. Nothing but the incessant battles of the horse's broadside in the hurricane tide kept that feeling in Lalande's heart that the swimmer was trying to cross the pass to Rojas's oak grove. The white devil was blind in the white sea, but he remembered that. Lalande could feel the leg strokes steady and true even when the waves lifted or buried them, or when they were half drowned in the whipped foam among patches of reef wreckage. The man was fighting at this débris to keep it from the stallion's neck when he felt something else streaming along his flanks. It appeared to be submerged bushes or thick, long grass twisting about beneath them. And there was a changed note to the hurricane's tumult.

Lalande swung up on the stallion's back, listening. The swells of the pass were slower here, huge and strangling, but not with the fierce rush they had battled. The horse was swimming more to seaward, almost head on now, and once he arose as if his forefeet had struck the earth.

"He has found the marsh," muttered Lalande. "Night of wonders; nothing else!"

Still that powerful, steady stroke under the man's clinging limbs. The brute was seeking whatever land might be above the water. Then Lalande began to think, as again he felt the forefeet touch bottom.

"Then we fight again, eh, tiger? Shake me off and come at me! Make the oaks and we'll see!"

The horse plunged past a torn oak stump which smashed him in the side. He was in water to his withers, but Lalande

knew he was climbing. He got a foothold, leaned against the tide rushing through the oak grove, and kept on. Against the man and horse there crushed another trunk, denuded of leaves, swinging by its roots, staggering them with its blows. The sea was over this also, Lalande knew. If it came higher there was no hope here.

Then the stallion stopped. He stood belly deep in the lee of another oak trunk which Lalande could feel in the utter dark. And the man sat silent astride the white king of Dautrive who had lost his domain and his subjects. He moved his legs across the heaving flanks—a sort of stealthy challenge. He wanted the white stud to know that he, Joe Lalande, was there astride him. He laughed and leaned to pat the unseen arch of the neck.

And then again came that furious, uprearing plunge of the great brute. His head came about in a side blow, his teeth tearing at Lalande's face as the rider swerved out under this twisting, maddened attack. He heard that trumpet cry again of the wild horse seeking him as he dragged himself about the oak tree in the water. He stood clutching the rope, trying to make out the brute's form.

Then he knew that the swells riding through the twisted oaks were slowed; the yelling of the winds more fitful, higher; and a sort of a check came to the clutch on his body against the tree. Lalande seemed to stand in a frothy eddy as if the sea had stopped running and was foaming to an apex about him. And he knew what it meant, the moment that always comes in the Gulf hurricanes. The wind was dying off and changing. The sea could do no more. It had piled its flood as far inland and as high as even its strength could hold. Its whirling centre was now over the coast, the wind whipping fitfully, now southwest, westerly, northward, and beginning to rise again. But there came one moment when it was almost a calm, silence except for that roaring in the sky.

"*La revanche*," muttered the man. "Now comes the worst—the rush of the tide back to sea. The good God help them all, these Cajans who have not found refuge up the bay. *La revanche*—that is when they die!"

He felt about his oak trunk, wondering if it were still rooted firmly. The white stallion must be just about the torn branches, for Lalande still had the trailing line. And then

came something that numbed him with uncanny fear. A voice out in the dark, a child's cry among the oaks.

"*La revanche!* *Grandpère*, it is coming! Get the lines the other way. *Grandpère*——"

Lalande went plunging toward the spot. "*Nom de Dieu!* It is not possible? Rojas!" He shouted, and stumbled among wreckage of trees and timbers around his waist. "Rojas, you are in the grove?"

A dim light glowed behind a blanket. He saw a boy had snatched this moment of the falling wind to try the lantern. When Lalande waded to the spot an old man straightened up on the other side of a sunken raft. Upon it, under the blankets, were lashed the forms of Rojas's children, the orphans of Émile, who had once sought to tame the white horse of Île Dautrive. Old Rojas held the lantern close to his white beard. He seemed as frightened as was the small boy by the stranger's coming.

Old Rojas had been trying to spike a cross-piece to his shattered raft. His lugger had been smashed in the first reach of the hurricane, and he had torn up the planks of his camp floor to build this refuge anchored to the biggest oaks of the grove. They knew what to do, these Cajans of the reefs, when they were caught by the hurricane tide. Cut the mast from the lugger and drift inland, seize an anchorage before the dreaded *revanche* took them seaward; or if not that, hang to one's oak stumps!

Lalande did not waste the precious moments with a single question.

"A brave fight, old man. I see you made a brave fight! Give me your raft-lines. The other way around now, and to the stoutest trees. This sea, it is like a mad tiger when it has to go back defeated! Come." He took the mooring-line and plunged off in the waist-deep froth.

"Day of wonders!" mumbled old Rojas. "A man on the reef—living! A big man, strong after the hurricane! It is impossible." He went on hammering his raft as it surged and plunged by his shoulders, ordering the youngster to make himself fast once more in the life-ropes which held them all to the shaking planks. There was no whimper from the four children. They raised big dark eyes staring from *Grandpère* to the strange man who was battling back in the first seaward

rush of the waters to make them fast against *la revanche*. The wind was smiting again. It appeared to fall out of the blackness to the north, blast after blast, rising swifter, smiting the piled-up waters, hurling them over the reef islands with thrice the speed they had come in.

The dim lantern went out. The fugitives tied themselves in again. If the worn lines held and the raft kept together they might live. "Name of Names!" grumbled old Rojas. "A man coming to us out of the sea? He said he would make fast for us. If not, my children—well, we must trust him."

Lalande had struggled off into the new rush of the wind with the raft-lines. They were frayed and ragged. He made them fast to his own new throw-rope. He would get this rope off the stallion somehow, and make it fast to the big oak. If not—he shrugged, well, then, nothing! Every wreck of a lugger, plank of a camp, driftlog, tree, that was loose would be miles in the open Gulf to-morrow to eddy endlessly in *la revanche*.

The old man's mooring-lines would not reach the big oak. Lalande had thought that, combined, they might last the night out, but the sea and wind were whipping fast on him in the dark. He had to plunge out shoulder deep to the tree, feeling of his line.

"The white devil is there and quiet," he grumbled. "If he would let me slip the rope from his shoulders and tie to the tree!" He breasted the brimming tides over the submerged isle past the oak, his hand cautiously out to the dark. "Devil!" he called softly. "This is for Emile Rojas's young ones. The rope, devil! We've fought, you and I, but now let me have it."

The line was tight past the oak stump. The weight of the raft was already coming strongly on it as the tide began to seethe through the shattered grove. Lalande could hardly keep his feet, or his eyes open against the bitter spray. Then he was off his feet; he was hanging to the line, fighting out on it, calling to his foe, reaching for him. The brute must be swimming now, for the footing had gone from under them both.

Lalande felt a plunging on the line. It was too late now to hope to get the rope to the oak. The fighting horse was on it, and it began to give slowly past the man's hands. *La*

revanche was bearing them on, the raft, the man, and the white devil who was its sole anchor now. Lalande clung with one arm to the oak and drew in on the line. The dead weight of the raft had its way. The bucking, plunging brute, now touching the ground, now surging in the tide, was being drawn to him. Lalande began to call again. He had a great sense of pity for the stud. There were things that could not be withstood even by his lion heart; yet even the sea might not conquer except for this choking drag of the raft that held Rojas's grandchildren.

Lalande touched the stallion's muzzle now, coming on fighting with the obstinate ferocity of a white shark. He crouched in the crotch of the oak and held out his arms to the stallion's neck. When finally the brute crashed upon the sunken oak, Lalande reached his fingers to the cleft where the throw-rope cut into his neck. He dragged on the line, vainly trying to ease that tension. Once he thought of his knife; he might cut that choking grip from the white stud's throat. Then Lalande lay back in the crotch above the plunging hoofs and eased the great head above his own shoulder. Dragging on the line with all his power he kept up his whispering as the hurricane tide rushed under them, swinging the oak on its roots, twisting it seaward, and sucking the earth away in whirls where Rojas's house had stood.

"I tell you we are still here, you and I," called Lalande after a while. "You and I, devil! You and I—smashed up together, my face against your own! *Eh, bien!* Be quiet, Emile Rojas may be watching his children, and you in this storm! Remember that, white devil, you have returned for them!" He laughed and shouted in the dark, his arm about the neck of the horse working his fingers under the rope, trying to take some of the strain upon his own flesh and bone. And presently he grumbled, "and remember, also, I am not a thief. Not a thief, eh?"

They clung that way five hours, until the crest of *la revanche* was passed. The sun even got through the huge rifts of black clouds streaming south by the time old Rojas stirred about from his creaking raft in the scrub oaks. Everywhere a brown, dirty, sullen sea setting out, flecked with drift and wreckage; and of all Île Dautrive nothing showed but these few battered, branchless trees.

The stout old man waded waist-deep from his raft where now Emile's young ones sat up stiff and drowsy from the sea's nightlong flailing. He followed his mooring-line out to where it sogged under water by the big oak. The eldest boy had stood up looking after him.

"*Grandpère!*" screamed the lad suddenly. "Look! The white horse has come! By the tree, with the man!"

Old Rojas waded and struggled there, too astounded to speak. The sight was a queer one, indeed. The white horse was drawn against the oak-crotch, pinned in there, in fact; and the rope from his neck also crushed the strange man against his shoulder. Joe Lalande appeared to be crucified against the satin coat of the stallion. But he lifted his free arm faintly when the old man floundered near them.

"M'sieu?" gasped Rojas. "You here?" He had to touch Lalande's drenched body ere he would believe that the man lived. Then he fell to loosening the slacked rope so that Lalande lurched down from the horse's neck into the water where he could hardly stand but clung to the tree trunk watching the animal. The rope had cut through Lalande's arm and shoulder until it made a long red-scarred mark from neck to elbow. He could not speak for a time from his salt-swollen lips.

"Yes, I am here," he whispered at last, and staggered weakly.

"Name of God, the white horse!" cried the old man. He put his hand out to touch the smooth side, but as if fearing him even now. Lalande was trying to discover whether or not the heart of the white stallion still beat; and then he turned away, his eyes closing wearily. He seemed to be shaken by a sob, a grief that the islander could not comprehend.

"What's the matter, M'sieu? We are safe; the boats will find us. *Le bon Dieu!* that was a storm! I have never seen a greater on this reef!"

Then he looked curiously at the still form of his old enemy. "*Eh, bien!* It took a white sea to kill this white devil, my friend!"

"It was not the sea," grumbled Lalande. "The touch of a rope on his neck, M'sieu. I saw his heart break last night, but it was for the children of Emile. A rope and the touch

of my hand upon his neck, they were not to be endured, M'sieu." Then Lalande turned away, as if speaking to the lord of Dautrive against the tree: "At least you must know this, white devil, the hand on you was not the hand of a thief."

OLD PETER TAKES AN AFTERNOON OFF

BY O. F. LEWIS

From Popular Magazine

WE HAD in the class of '06 in Huntington College the best varsity pitcher in the history of the institution, and in that year every last one of us fellows was proud to address him as "Old Peter." To-day, fifteen years after, the students about the campus know him by the one nickname of the "Old Simp."

But they are putting a curious tone into the name these days. His hair is partly gray, he's the driest thing that ever got a toe hold on the faculty of the college, and his classes are the limit for arid atmosphere. Until the middle of last September no one would have believed at the college that the Old Simp would ever make a dent even in a mould of lemon jelly. But that was before Peter took an afternoon off, down in New York.

Old Peter's name is Peter Simpkins. He came to college from up in Holton Crossroads, Vermont, and "Hoddy" Irving, our aged Latin professor, friend of all the freshmen, took him of course under his wing and pulled him through the first year of homesickness. These latter years the college has long since given up trying to figure out what hit Old Peter after his final triumphant season in baseball when at the close of his great senior year the world seemed to lie before him because of his extraordinary career as our leading varsity pitcher. I know of two good bids he had to go into business, and one of the scouts of the Giants made him a corking offer to join that team the season after college was over.

But in the fall of '06 Old Peter turned up again at Hunting-

ton as tutor in Hoddy Irving's Latin department, all the pep gone out of him. And it stayed out. In time, after they had turned Old Hoddy out to pasture on a slim pension, Peter slipped noiselessly into the older man's chair in Latin. And then gradually the young co-eds, watching the half-shabby, prematurely gray, loose-jointed man going up the hill to his classes in Holbrook Hall as the autumn leaves fell romantically over him from the elms, pondered the fixed tradition that some college widow, back there, had thrown Old Peter down so hard that it broke his back and he never got up again. My idea was different. I believed that Peter loved Hoddy Irving as a son loves his father and that he just came back to *him* after graduation.

Anyhow, there he was! Peter's social status continued to be "unmarried," with no show of a change. He was notoriously wedded to his self-appointed life work, which was nothing less than some thirteen hundred pages of double-spaced manuscript, entitled: "The Early Customs of the Mound Builders of Huntington County." For fifteen years, ever since Peter had gone suddenly dotty on this piece of research for which he was going to get some time a Ph. D. from some college or other when the thing was all done and published, he had been meeting his Latin classes with undeviating regularity; but between classes he was forever, with ceaseless devotion and single-track mind, occupying this virgin field of exploration. His sparse conversation with others teemed with references to Huntington County's mound builders and he was rarely invited to dinners or other peppy events like the college dances.

Toozling parties, wandering through the woods about the college, sometimes met Old Peter abruptly and would draw apart hastily with flushed countenances. But the Old Simp didn't seem to notice anything out of the ordinary. He was on the trail of a mound builder. His classes bored the students stiff but they were compulsory like chapel. However, from time to time, some reference in the classroom to the times back in 1902 to 1906 would bring out an unexpected, human, quizzical smile about the lips of Old Peter and some tender, loyal story of the old times and the old boys. Then the beastly recitation would go on.

He occupied year after year a small room in Mrs. Tom

Black's boarding house and never went to athletic games but plugged on the mound builders. The boys said they'd see his light going sometimes almost all night. Seniors said his life badly needed the touch of a woman's hand; his clothes were shockingly old and unpressed and his hair was a sight. They said about the college that he was supporting an aged mother somewhere or had an insane sister and they didn't see how he managed to do it at all on his salary.

We come to the hour of two-fifteen on a certain afternoon of last September. Old Peter sat in the office of the editor-in-chief of the publishing house of Winthrop Forbes on lower Fifth Avenue. Peter was slowly folding up his "Mound Builders" in heavy Manila wrapping paper. Jim Sexton, of the class of 1906 of Huntington College, now editor-in-chief of Winthrop Forbes, held his forefinger on the twine.

Jim put his hand on Old Peter's thin knee.

"Peter, old scout, that's the honest truth! There's not sufficient market for a work like yours, wonderful as it is. We can't print that sort of thing at a loss, particularly in these days. Perhaps some foundation might take it or a college press or some scientific body or——"

Peter's big sunken eyes lifted, to rest on Jim's features. He had tried eleven other publishing houses before finally coming to the college friend of the old days. Jim's grip tightened on the bony knee. He couldn't go on. Old Peter had been self-revealing to Jim Sexton—had revealed the growing, ghastly conviction in the professor's soul that what he had toiled all these years to give to the world the world couldn't use and therefore didn't want.

"You see, Peter," said Jim Sexton, haltingly, "if you'd only brought me a baseball yarn or some sport story—something, for instance, that our juvenile department could use—you were such a whale of a good pitcher back there—— Ever tried a novel—for boys?"

Peter shook his head.

Presently Sexton accompanied him down the curving marble stairs to the first floor then past the long rows of tables stacked with Winthrop Forbes's latest books—where Peter had dreamed that his "Mound Builders" might rest next

year. Out upon the Avenue he went. In his pocket was Jim Sexton's card.

"Come and see me, Peter, before you go back to Huntington! Be sure to ring me up beforehand!" had urged Sexton.

Revelation surged over Peter. All through these same fifteen years Jim Sexton, the laughed-at fat boy of the class of 1906, had been hewing his way through to the head position in the house of Winthrop Forbes. Peter stumbled up the Avenue. Under his arm bulged the Manila-wrapped manuscript. Cold truth beat down on him like a trip-hammer. He saw these unending crowds as if for the first time. These throngs of young girls, twenty years, fifteen years younger than he, dangling light furs even on this warm day, descending from limousines, passing with unseeing eyes, swinging down the street two and three abreast, rich, self-confident, ignoring his existence! The prosperous, self-sufficient people in the busses! Success, wealth, everywhere!

A ponderous, highly coloured woman emerged from a dog shop with a barking animal under her arm. "My dear, I got him preposterously cheap! Only four twenty-five! I made them come down from six hundred."

"You certainly did, my dear! I paid seven hundred for Toto and now he's gone and caught distemper!"

Old Peter's eyes fell upon the crowded dining room of the Waldorf and noted a young girl seated by the window, picking daintily and hesitatingly at some choice morsel—the waiter hovering with concerned look behind her chair. Peter sensed that he was hungry. In a white-tiled lunchroom he found a chair far back from the front door. A sentence of Jim Sexton's rang in his ears:

"Take an afternoon off, Peter! If I didn't have the weekly conference of our editors this afternoon you and I'd get in eighteen holes at Windemere. You don't play golf? Well, take an afternoon off, anyway, Peter!"

Old Peter ate his baked beans and apple pie. An overwhelming loneliness swept over him. He shivered slightly, intermittently. A dread of facing the people on the Avenue came upon him. He grew conscious that two young fellows, seated in adjacent chairs, were heatedly discussing some matter. Dully he began to listen, staring unseeingly at the elaborate bill of fare on the highly polished wall.

"Betcher the Bambino knocks another homer this afternoon!"

"Betcher he don't knock no homer this afternoon!"

"Betcher five!"

"You're on!"

"Betcher Shawkey pitches!"

"Betcher Hoyt pitches!"

The two men went out, leaving behind them an early afternoon paper. Old Peter reached slowly for it. Weary and sick at heart, his eyes fell upon the smiling face of "Babe" Ruth and under it the caption: "The Highest-Priced Ball Player in the World!"

Old Peter paid his twenty-cent check to the fat-faced cashier with the billowing blonde hair and the lurid lips.

"Could you inform me, please, where the Polo Grounds are?" he asked. "Is that the place where they play baseball this afternoon?"

The stately person withdrew the toothpick from her lips. She looked at Peter meditatively. Her expression grew kindly. She tilted forward in her chair, glanced at the clock.

"Some big town this, isn't it? You just got time. Go one block west, and take the 'L' going north. Follow the crowd on the train. Better sit over behind third base, about five rows from the bottom if you can get a seat; there's more seats empty there this late."

Old Peter's eyes opened wide. "Do *you* ever go?"

"Not to-day, thanks! Do I ever go? Does Babe Ruth bat left-handed? You bet I go! And you'd better get a move on now!"

The next man in line pushed Peter forward impatiently.

"Take an afternoon off!" said the blonde cashier a bit sharply.

She watched Old Peter's slow disappearance through the door, then looked wisely at the thin, sallow-faced man who was paying his check, shook her head, and elevated her eyebrows. A third man, coming up shortly to pay his bill, passed a Manila-wrapped package over to the woman.

"The guy what went out left it in his chair!"

The cashier shoved the package under the counter and punched the cash register. When business grew quieter she reached under the counter and examined the writing on the

package. Then she stared out upon Fifth Avenue, her forehead puckered.

"What the hell is mound builders?" she murmured.

While Old Peter was wedged tightly among the billowing throng of ticket seekers that moved spasmodically toward some invisible gates in front of them he discovered that his manuscript was gone! Henceforth, for some minutes, the mass of rocking, surging, grunting men bore Peter's body along with them on legs that moved automatically. His mind was chasing frantically backward, through the train, through the streets, finally seeking a white-tiled lunchroom! His soul was falling into an abyss of despair. The duplicate copy at Huntington didn't have the last seven chapters on the newly discovered mounds at Chatham, nor the annotations in red ink!

Peter tried to draw out of the crowd, like a fish that feels the hook for the first time. Squeezed against the street fence, half crushed, he was shot ultimately through a gate into the backwaters of comparative calm inside the grounds. Long-forgotten shouts met his ears:

"*Score cards! Get your score cards! Only correct batting order of the game! Get your hot peanuts, five a bag! Here y'are, red hot, red hot!*"

Sudden, vivid memories crowded into his mental vision. Those great afternoons, back in 1906, at Soldiers' Field, Yale Field, Franklin Field! The afternoons he had pitched the little freshwater-college team to victory—old Huntington, that had come down out of the woods and licked the biggest college teams in the whole country! The only year old Huntington had ever pulled it off!

"*Hot peanuts! Red-hots, red-hots! Ice-cold lemonade!*"

That's what Old Peter had heard them selling in the stands fifteen years before! The marvellous sequence of his victories passed before him. He put his hand to his eyes. He straightened up. His lips parted. The crowds before him were hurrying to secure their belated seats in the stadium of the Polo Grounds. He saw in memory other crowds, back there, surging to their feet upon the bleachers, waving the light blue of Huntington, dancing and prancing, singing the college hymn, shouting shrilly while the college band blared

out "Fair Huntington" and the gang cheered itself hoarse behind the rocking, twisting cheer leaders! He remembered with a strange thrill the snake dance they did across John Harvard's field! The score itself flashed across his eyes: Huntington 5, Harvard 4! Eleven innings!

Old Peter moved on toward the towering structure of the stadium. He could see nothing of the field as yet but he heard the crack of a bat in the stillness—the immediate howl of the mob. A thrill went up and down his spine. *The crack of the bat!* He pulled a long, long breath into his lungs. He felt his toe digging once more down into the dirt of the front of the mound. He felt himself winding up; out of the corner of his eye he threw a glance at the man playing off first base; he shot again that famous in-drop that broke just before it reached the plate! He saw again the crowd, *his* crowd of rooters, rush down out of the bleachers, dash upon the field, raise him precipitously to their shoulders, bear him triumphant off the field. The crowd he *belonged* to!

Peter, alone in New York, belonging to nobody, walked almost gropingly toward the lower grand-stand seats. The full view of the arena burst upon him and he paused, with shortened breath. No such sight as this came out of his memory! Endless rows of people—and endless faces! Upstairs, just the same. People out on the bleachers, also!

Over all hung an almost absolute stillness. It was a crowd stiffened into stone. Only the white-coated venders of soft drinks plied like small butterflies in and out of the mass, in the distance.

"What—is it?" asked Peter, half under his breath, of a man in the crowd in front of him. The man spoke, finally, without turning.

"Babe Ruth's up! Two on bases, one out, and——"

Crack!

There broke on the world a roar of sound. Countless backs of people surged upward in front of Peter; arms gesticulated madly with wild contortions. Down came a hand on a straw hat. The roar continued, died down, billowed, came to a climax. He visioned a heavy man with an amiable smile circling the bases. Slowly the mob before him resumed their seats.

The crack of the bat! Half breathlessly, Old Peter sought

to discover a seat in this immense throng. Behind the last row of seats in the very back of the stadium he paused to glimpse between the shoulders and the heads of the crowd in front of him the delivery of the gray-uniformed pitcher in the box. He saw the squatting catcher, the bent-over umpire, the field, all curiously foreshortened in perspective. He lost himself in the marvellous control of the man in the pitcher's box.

He began to forecast his every motion.

"It'll be an inshoot! An out-drop! He'll groove this one!"

Peter's heart thumped, his cheeks burned, the perspiration stood on his forehead. He burst into a shrill yell when a third strike-out was scored. People about him turned sharply. He was cheering the opposing pitcher. Peter pulled an enormous breath. He remembered that there were eight innings more and that the cashier had said he ought to sit behind third base.

Ten minutes later, tucked away in a seat in the sun, about nine rows from the aisle just behind the boxes lining the field, infinitesimal part of the thirty thousand human beings at the Polo Grounds, Peter sat in the great broad outer air of the amphitheatre, saw the players, commanded the wide sweep of the living throngs of people, and felt as though he were also on the field. Again came to him that long-forgotten sensation of being out there in the pitcher's box himself—the feeling that these crowds were watching *him*, *his* game, *his* team. He felt strange shivers run up and down his spine. Into his right arm seemed to come the craving to pitch, to cut the edge of the plate—to fool the batsman——

Then there rolled over him again, like a crushing machine, the inexorable fact of his disaster. Fate had done this day her absolute worst—but he was still alive! His work of fifteen years had been turned down, irrevocably. No Ph. D. for him! No alignment of him, Peter Simpkins, Ph. D., among the scholars of America. His very life task he had himself ignominiously lost somewhere—and he didn't know where to find it. Financially, he was also a dismal failure. He didn't have a hundred dollars in the bank. Jim Sexton had pitied him—all the editors had pitied him. At the college, he knew, they called him the "Old Simp." He had

borne it so long as he knew that ultimately he would confute all his critics with the publication of his epoch-making work on the mound builders. But to-day—and forever from now on—he *was* an old simp. The cashier in the cheap restaurant had pitied him. A bald-headed man in the crowd outside the grounds had made fun of him while they stood there. Others in the crowd had laughed at him.

Peter's fists clenched. It was all over! He'd done his best for fifteen years. He raised his eyes about at a level with the top of the grand-stand. His teeth pressed upon his lower lip. He shouted mentally to himself:

"I'm through! Damned if I don't take an afternoon off—from myself and—and everything else!"

Then, with an enormously long breath and with arms outstretched for an instant, Peter threw off violently the whole horrible past. He stood up as the inning closed and the other team took the field. He straightened up, surveyed the endless rows of people. The peanut man was tossing bags of peanuts to people sitting in the rows, in return for the coin tossed to him. Peter was mildly fascinated by the process. He found ten cents in his pocket, tossed it dexterously to the vender. Back came a bag, describing a wide arc. Peter caught it gracefully—the old automatic way of the natural ball player. A second bag came at him, unexpectedly, almost caught him napping. He caught it with the same hand, heard someone shout: "*Two out!*" and sat down smiling.

"You must 'a' played ball some time!" said a pleasant voice beside him. Peter looked up at a short, stocky, round-faced man of perhaps fifty, eying him genially. A warm, mellow feeling seemed to flow through Peter. He wanted to talk to somebody, to be *with* somebody.

"I played ball in college—Huntington College, back in nineteen-five and nineteen-six. Pitched. Won't you have some peanuts?"

The stocky, round-faced man seemed to bore Peter with his eyes. His fat hand dug automatically into the paper bag extended by Peter. He said nothing, munched peanuts, watched meditatively the preliminary tossing of the ball across the diamond. Peter wondered what he had done to offend him.

Then the man turned abruptly to Peter. "Your name's Simpkins!"

Peter's breath stopped; his lips opened wide; he looked thoroughly frightened. The fat man chuckled and grinned. "You pitched against Harvard, didn't you?—beat 'em. And Yale? Sure you did! Say, you were *some* pitcher, boy! And Johnny McGraw was after you! Course I remember! Well, well!"

Never in Peter's existence had such a marvellous thing happened to him! Half fearfully he shot a glance at the people around him. Several men in the row behind were listening intently—gazing at him, Peter, with keen eyes. "How'd—how'd you know?" stammered Peter.

The stocky little man tapped his forehead solemnly. "Memory, son! Newspaper man all my life. Covered baseball nearly thirty years; big college games earlier; the big league now. Got an afternoon off—and see what I do! Come right up here! Remember you because you pitched so much like Matty—headwork, you know! Never forget. Well, well! What you doing now?"

"I'm teaching—at Huntington. And I'm—publishing a work on the mound builders of Huntington County—that is, I'm—I lost the manuscript to-day——"

The third inning had begun.

"Know these players?" softly asked the newspaper man from behind a chunky cigar. Peter shook his head timidly but with tingling nerves. No such praise had been his in years! Then began a wonderful adventure for the Old Simp. Familiarly and almost uninterruptedly this man of complete knowledge of baseball unfolded to the lonely, friendless Peter not only the names and histories of the men before him but also, as the game went on, much of the inside stuff in baseball that had developed since Peter's time.

For emphasis the newspaper man now and then rested his hand upon Peter's knee. He called these men by their first names, he associated with them, he knew their salaries, their foibles, their strength, their humanness. Peter was in a dream. This man was treating him not only like a human being but with something more than that in his tone.

"Son," he said, between innings, "tell you something funny! Always wanted to be able to play ball—pitch, like

you—that's why I remembered you all these years! My dream never came true. Simpkins, you might be out there right now—managing one of those teams—man with your brains—after you'd lost your wing. Might perhaps be still pitching. Still, you did best, probably. Tell me about this mound-builder stuff!"

Peter told him, with a certain mixture of emotion and bravado. He mustn't show the man the whole truth of his abysmal failure. While Peter went on, the newspaper man said nothing; just looked Peter in the eye, understandingly; nodded occasionally. When Peter came to the story of the loss of his manuscript his voice wavered. "So perhaps I ought to—have gone into baseball, you see!" ended Peter with a rueful smile.

The newspaper man hit Peter on the back, none too gently. "You're all right, son! Buck up! Something'll come to you. You watch!"

Something did come, at that very moment. High into the air shot a foul, off the bat of a left-handed batter. Instinctively the people in the seats about Peter rose, measuring with quick eye the probable arc of the falling ball. Peter found himself standing, shading his eyes with one hand from the sun, gluing his vision upon that descending sphere.

"Look out there! Catch it! Look out, lady!"

Down came the ball, but not so soon as Peter had at first thought. Would it come to him? Waving, clutching hands on all sides reached for it. Someone shoved him roughly aside but he regained his equilibrium. He thrilled with the old feel of the diamond!

"Take it, son!" he heard a voice shout.

"It's *mine*!" yelled Peter.

Smack! The ball was Peter's. Not for anything would he have muffed it. The sting of pain was for a moment intense but he clung to the ball. Wildly clutching hands sought to wrest it from him but he held it fast. The crowd receded from him. Erect, he stood recovering his poise. Then he threw the ball with quick and powerful sweep of his arm far out upon the diamond, so that it was caught by the catcher near the home plate.

Murmurs rose from the stand. Such a return of a ball was unusual. People generally kept the balls they secured and

fooled the policeman when he sought the culprit. But such a throw, low, straight as an arrow, from way behind third base! It would easily have caught a man running in from third! Who was this guy in the grand-stand? Sporadic applause burst from the seats. A Polo Grounds crowd is always looking for a new sensation.

"Put him in! Let him pitch!" shouted someone behind Peter.

People laughed. Peter went fiery red. The newspaper man pulled at his coat tail. Peter's arm ached. He hadn't thrown a ball like that since he left college. But as the men around him jollied him now, asking what big league he belonged to and kidded him for not keeping the ball and all that, Peter glowed with the joy that had not been his since college days, of being the centre of an achievement! For it had been an extraordinary catch, followed by a surprising throw.

So he found himself talking easily, familiarly even, with the newspaper man and with others round about. The newspaper man told the people near him who this chap really was that had caught the ball—an old college man who had had the chance to sign up with the Giants and had turned it down! Peter was being vouched for by an authority! Peter bought thereupon a half-dozen ice-cream cones and gave them joyously to his neighbours.

"Have a cigar, sir?" said a young man to him most respectfully.

Every little while the newspaper man emitted a series of quiet chuckles.

"Take you round to see McGraw some time!" he said. "How'd you like to be a scout for the Giants—looking up new timber—college teams—bush leaguers? Pay you twice as much as you're getting now! Might find some new mound builders, too!"

In the midst of his growing bewilderment at this unprecedented afternoon in which he had suddenly blossomed forth as a personage he became gradually aware that people near him were staring in his direction, pointing toward him, and that some men in the distance were standing, craning their necks. At first he thought himself the continued object of attention. But no! He glanced to his right. For the first

time he discovered that there was sitting next to him a young woman—and that this young woman was smoking a cigarette! As he looked with wide-opened eyes at her she drew the cigarette slowly from her very red lips, and smiled at him.

"You made a bully catch, buddy!" she said. "You're sure some little life-saver! Thought I was gone!"

Peter had no answer. This young woman was not like any of the co-eds at Huntington College! And smoking in public! In a grand-stand! He looked beyond her for her escort. There was none. Two boys only—clearly not belonging to her. Peter stammered words. She eyed him keenly, tossed her head slightly, blew puffs of smoke into the air. Shouts came from near by.

"Sit down! Down front there!"

More people were rising to their feet. What was a common sight in restaurant or home seemed astonishing and noteworthy here. Surge after surge of human waves billowed up. It was between innings. People wanted to see the fight, if there was one. Those who couldn't see anything were the most excited. Perhaps they were firing gamblers from the Polo Grounds! Good-humouredly the crowd struggled to discover what was going on. In the centre of this crowd, seated, were the highly painted woman with the defiant cigarette—and Peter.

From somewhere came the words to his ears: "Gee, he's got some classy jane with him, that ball player!" There was more laughter. Remarks were bandied about, regarding the woman who was smoking. Peter saw her colour change even under the rouge and paint. The remarks about her became more pronounced, the laughter more boisterous. Peter felt strangely about her. She was not old; this demonstration of brutal male callousness and curiosity, this lack of chivalry toward womankind, stirred some deep sense of anger and injustice in Peter. A man behind the young woman had just extended a silver cigarette case to her over her left shoulder.

"Have an imported one, girlie!"

Peter jumped to his feet.

"You—you people quit that!" he shouted. "You let this—lady alone. I don't believe—in women smoking—but this lady's alone and I——"

Peter knew he was being drawn rapidly into unknown fields of action. Never before had he dared to depart so from the orderly conduct of life. He found himself shaking with excitement, with something he couldn't control. What was he going to do next? He caught the eye of the young woman looking up at him. She expected him to get her out of this thing; that was clear.

"Sit down!" he shouted. "You let this lady alone!"

Someone pulled at his coat, dragging him to his seat. It was the newspaper man. But from the row of seats in front of him a hoarse laugh broke. Peter caught sight of a husky, black-haired, thickset man standing and pointing derisively at the woman. He looked straight at Peter.

"Lady?" He paused. "You know this—lady?"

The intonation in his voice was clear, even to Peter.

"And as for you," the man continued, "you hick, you keep your big feet out o' my back from now on, see? Diggin' your toes into me all the time! Think I'm a doormat?"

"I didn't put your feet in my back—I mean my feet in your back!" stammered Peter, excitedly.

The crowd gave a joyful laugh. Things were coming along great!

The heavy-jawed man scowled, almost burying his eyes in the thick folds of flesh. He brushed the back of his coat ostentatiously. "What's that? Laughing at me? Why, you—you rube, I'd knock your block off for a quarter!"

"You would, would you?" retorted Peter, shrilly. He couldn't think of anything stronger to say. With each moment he wanted to do something more and more violent. Words were becoming so shallow. "And," said Peter, springing to his feet, "you take back what you—you meant about this—lady!"

Peter heard the hoarse laugh again and immediately felt a shock against his cheek and head such as he had only once before in life experienced—when he had fallen off the back-yard fence in childhood and had hit upon his head.

The next instant Peter was transformed into a wild man. Madly, blindly, doggedly he laced into the man in the next row in front. He was no longer the Old Simp from Huntington College, a professor, a law-abiding citizen. He was crazy to pound, to tear, to strike, to destroy. All the pent-up

woe of persistent failure, all the nerve-racking days of the past weeks, all the half-conscious sense of inferiority to other people, all the depths of humiliation of the last hours, the irrevocable loss of his manuscript, the success of other men, the realization of what he might perhaps have been in baseball—all centred now in an elemental explosion of the physical and nerve forces within Old Peter.

The very blows that landed on him, the cruel punishment that he received from his antagonist seemed not to hurt him so much as to exhaust and in some way to assuage him. Now he was borne down between the seats, now he caught an arm and twisted it until a shriek of agony resulted, now he was almost suffocated by the grip of a hand on his throat—and at last, face and body aching violently, blood warm and wet running down over his eyes, he found himself dragged violently to his feet and out of the aisle, up steps and steps and steps, while round about him swirled human forms and round about him rose confused shouts and noises. Then he seemed to be dragged again, half on his feet, half sagging, a long, long way. His brain refused to work; he would go just where they carried him. He caught sight of blue sleeves and brass buttons.

Through the interminable night in the cell Peter sat with head buried much of the time in his hands. A filthy hobo; a lad of seventeen, wild for a shot of dope in his arm; an unpleasant individual who had been caught bootlegging and cursed the Government—these were Peter's cellmates.

Only one thing solaced Peter at all. He had not allowed to be dragged from him, in the night court, a few hours before, any clew as to who he was. He would never disgrace Huntington College! John Jones was the name he had given. They had remanded him for further examination in the morning. Assault and battery the charge was.

No one from the Polo Grounds had appeared against him save two policemen. Peter was aghast at what they had said about him! But all that was as nothing compared to his future! Prison? What was his future, if not prison? Nothing! He couldn't ever go back to Huntington now! Yet he was good for nothing else except teaching. Somewhere in Arizona, perhaps, or Alaska? His clothes were torn.

his face horribly swollen and tender, his shirt and collar streaked with dried blood, and his whole soul was sore.

Peter shuddered as the flickering light outside the cell revealed fitfully the sordid and unbelievable environment into which sudden fate had plunged him. The lad of seventeen seemed never to cease walking up and down the narrow cell, moaning for the heroin he craved or clamouring that Peter assure him he wouldn't be sent away to prison. The hobo rolled uneasily upon the bed and snored and in his sleep he persistently scratched his body. The bootlegger addressed remarks to nobody, in constant repetition.

Toward morning, Peter fell into a brief, troubled sleep.

Peter's turn in the courtroom had come. The blue-coated attendant beckoned to him, led him to a railing in front of the bench where the judge sat in his black gown. Since Peter had come into the courtroom he had kept his eyes firmly on the floor. He must go through with this horrible disgrace as best he could. But above all—not give in, not betray Huntington! John Jones—that's the name—don't forget!

Peter stood, his eyes on a small panel at the bottom of the wooden bench of justice before him. Somewhere above him the judge sat. He heard confused murmurs all about him. He had seen out of the corner of his eye a great courtroom filled with people.

The judge spoke—a gentle voice above him:

"You are Professor Peter Simpkins of Huntington College?"

Peter's shoulders rose heavily, fell, and his body sagged.

"Look up, professor, and follow the evidence!" Peter looked up, and saw a fugitive smile pass over the face of the clean-shaven, youthful man upon the bench. This was not the same judge as the one with the gray hair and the big moustache in the night court!

Peter listened dully to the two policemen going over the story again. But gradually he noticed that they were not saying the same thing they said last night. They didn't accuse him this morning of all that was bad and lawless! They just told how they arrived and found a fight going on and had arrested one of the fighters and how they couldn't find the other man.

Without comment, the judge dismissed them.

"Mr. Arthur Emerson!" he called.

Down the aisle of the courtroom came the sound of brisk steps and Peter saw a man seat himself in the witness chair. It was the newspaper man of yesterday.

The judge took from his desk a newspaper clipping perhaps a foot long. He showed the clipping to the witness.

"Mr. Emerson, did you write this newspaper account of Professor Simpkins and of the fight of yesterday which appeared in the *Morning Sphere* to-day?"

"Yes, sir."

"And this is an accurate account of—Professor Simpkins and of the circumstances leading up to the encounter for which the professor was arrested?"

"It is, your honour. I'd like to say, sir, that the *Sphere* likes once in a while to run a character story like that—human interest, you see—close to the hearts of the people. The way the old New York *Orb* used to do. And this Professor Simpkins yesterday—he made a wonderful story. I used to do that kind of thing for the *Orb*. And, your honour, may I say one thing more? I meant to look up the professor last evening and help him but I got word at the office that my wife had met with a slight accident. I rushed home—it just drove the professor right out of my mind—until this morning."

The judge bent over toward Peter and extended to him the clipping.

"Professor, have you seen this morning's *Sphere*?"

Peter, desperate with apprehension, shook his head. The whole thing in the newspapers! The college disgraced!

"Professor, read this article!" the judge continued. "And I want to say to you, sir, that I am personally proud of a man in these days who will run the danger of enduring even what you have endured for the sake of defending the fair name of a woman, even when, as in this case, she is a total stranger to him. Won't you please read the article through?"

Dumbly Peter took the clipping and began to read. There it all was, briefly but unmistakably tenderly told. The echoes of the old days, when he had pitched his great games; the catch he had made yesterday of the high foul—even the kidding on the grand-stand! There was the story of his

long throw to the catcher at the home plate and a remark made by one of the ball players about it after the game. There was the story of the altercation; and then the fight—and how this gentle professor from Huntington, specialist on mound builders, had fought like a cave man when attacked brutally by the man who insulted womankind in the person of the stranger next the gray-haired professor.

Oh, it was a story, all right!

Then something more happened. The judge rose and leaned over the bench. "Professor Simpkins," he said, "you are discharged—and honourably. You were not the aggressor but defended yourself as best you could against a bully. I regret that you should have suffered incarceration even for one night. And now, sir, permit me, as a graduate of Huntington College myself, of the class of 'nine, to thank you for what you did! My name is Billings. Don't you remember me?"

The lips of Peter quivered and the tears started. He groped for a handkerchief but found none. The judge passed him his own. The reporters, covering the court in anticipation of a story, scribbled industriously. Oh, boy! Stuff for the early afternoon editions!

Bang! The gavel sounded.

"Court adjourned for fifteen minutes!"

In the judge's private chamber stood four men. Peter, disheveled to a positively disgraceful extent; Judge Billings, obviously proud of the fighting professor of Huntington College; Arthur Emerson, dyed-in-the-wool baseball reporter, who had landed a story; Jim Sexton, who had just come tearing up in his limousine, having read belatedly the *Morning Sphere*.

As they stood there, there was a discreet knock at the door.

"Come in," said the judge.

A court attendant showed the way to a large, fair-haired young woman with a Manila-wrapped bundle under her arm. Her eye fell upon the black robe of the judge. She addressed herself to him.

"Here's that 'Mound Builder' thing they wrote about in the *Morning*—— My God!"

She had caught sight of Professor Simpkins, not at all garbed at the moment to meet the fair sex.

"Peter," said Jim Sexton as the two rode in the closed car toward Jim's home where the professor was to be fitted out in human togs again, "Peter, old boy, I've got a pleasant little surprise for you. Two surprises, in fact. I telephoned up to Huntington this morning, as soon as I read that story in the *Sphere*, and told them I'd look out for you, of course. Lots of the boys had already read it, and I tell you, old man, they think you're all right! Know what they're going to do at twelve o'clock to-day? Ring the college bell for five minutes for scrappy Old Peter! How's that, old scout?"

Peter dug his teeth into his lower lip.

"And, Peter, the second thing is that we're going to publish your 'Mound Builders,' after all. You see, it's a lot different to-day. Think of the advertising you've gotten since yesterday! We can have thousands of copies of that story in the *Sphere* zinc etched. And you couldn't buy that kind of advertising for thousands of dollars——"

Peter blinked at Jim Sexton, lips wide open.

"It's all right, Peter, and now I want to ask you what you might write for us next. Something up to the minute, to follow up this book, you know?"

Peter was silent. Finally he spoke:

"I—I don't know, Jim!"

"Come, old man, think! Think! It's the psychological moment for you right now!"

Over Peter's battered countenance spread a broad and happy smile.

"I have it, Jim! Just the thing! There are a lot of mound builders that no one has done yet, over in Franklin County!"

IG'S AMOK

By GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

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MANSLAUGHTER and murder are variously regarded, but wherever civilization has risen to so much as a fig leaf, excepting always the Flowery Kingdom and the Kingdom of the Rising Sun, the gods of the place and the people who inhabit it have fixed their canons against self-slaughter. The white man who is bent on suicide simply disrespects these injunctions and kills himself; the black and brown peoples, more especially those who are of Malay descent, get around them.

When a man runs amok his object, nine times out of ten, is not to see how many people he can kill, but so to inflame public opinion that he will be cut down himself and spared the dubious hereafter of the suicide.

Ig had the wish neither to destroy himself nor to be destroyed by others. His house was commodious. It stood upon tall stilts over an estuary of tidal water. His pig sty stood next to it. There were plenty of mats in the house and plenty of pigs in the sty.

Ig's wife had more bright silk dresses and metal bracelets than the average wife, and there was no occasion so informal or ceremonious that Ig was not in a position to array himself fashionably for it. He nearly always had tobacco, and from the centre post of the house was suspended a treasure the like of which was not to be found even in the Sultan's Armoury.

It was a two-handed sword which a roving and adventurous ancestor of its present proprietor had brought home together with a couple of young princesses from an island far to the southward.

The idea of this sword was that if a powerful man laid on with it his enemy would fall to the ground in two pieces. But although Ig was by far the most powerful man of the men of Pauru he had never had occasion to unsheathe the frightful decapitator in anger and try it out.

Before you strike with the average sword you pull it out of its scabbard. But the sword from the island to the southward was sheathed on a different principle. The case was in two flat parts which were tied together at four points with fragile dried grasses. When you struck, therefore, the scabbard burst open and fell to the ground in the same number of pieces as your adversary.

Merely to heft the sword was to believe that its mechanical principles were sound and fatal. The back was thick and heavy; the edge, which could be perceived between the halves of the scabbard, was hideously sharp.

Ig, then, had everything that a man really needs to make him happy. Household goods, pigs, a wife, a fancy sword, health, youth, strength, and a mind which very seldom became too active for comfort. And he had begun his career as a married man without any nervous system whatever.

His wife Plu, however, though of good family—one brother was in the Sultan's privy council—was an insufferable scold, chatterer, and fault finder. Ig, in her quick, acquisitive eyes, could never do right.

After eight years of this his nervous system went suddenly to pieces. It was a balmy spring morning. Everybody ought to have been peaceful and happy. But Plu had waked while it was still dark and she had been scolding and finding fault ever since.

The first thing Ig knew he was lost in a red cloud. When he came out of it the scabbard of the ancestral sword lay on the floor at his feet in two pieces, and one piece of his wife lay in one corner of the house and the other piece of her lay in another.

When a white man weathers a homicidal brainstorm and returns to his senses he is more apt than not to beg the question of arrest and trial by jury by turning the smoking or reeking weapon which he still holds in his hand against himself. But Ig was not a white man, and he well knew that the ghosts of suicides are tormented throughout eternity by having

splinters of burning pitch pine continually thrust under the nails of their ten fingers and their ten toes. And even in the white man's Hell, according to Mr. Kelp, the missionary resident in Pauru, the punishment is of a fiery nature.

It was, however, out of the question for a man in Ig's really ignominious and provoking situation to go on living. The price of another wife in pigs, silks, and rubber would ruin him. And even if the severed woman could be duplicated it was doubtful if any respectable parent in the village would entrust the happiness of a daughter to a man who had made such a show of himself.

After all the cackle and chatter and scoldings of the last eight years the sudden silence in the house was appalling. The silence was not only to be noticed within the house, but without, and half an hour had not passed with Ig hectically trying to decide what he ought to do next when the ancient woman named Toto Shag remarked it.

Toto Shag lived in the nearest house on the right. In her youth she had been captured back in the forest where the river is only a spring at the root of a tree, and brought to Pauru in a Malacca cage. When she had been tamed and taught a few words of Pauru she had been taken out of the cage and initiated by the Sultan himself into the mysteries and delights of court life. But time withering her and custom stealing her charm, she had been pensioned and sent to live in a house which was just about as far from the Sultan's house as it was possible for a house to be. Remarking the silence that was upon the house of Ig, this old lady set out to ascertain the cause.

Ig, his mind in a fearful flurry of indecision, heard the sounds of her hands and feet upon the rungs of his house ladder and came to the conclusion that if anything was to be done it must be done at once.

When the withered head of Toto Shag, with its black forest eyes and its toothless mouth full of questions, appeared through the ladder opening in the floor of Ig's house, it must have been obvious even to the most casual observer that the life of such a mischievous old woman is preserved only at a great expense to the community in general. Her gold hair ornaments alone were worth the purchase money of a young and comely wife of good family.

The old woman's marvellous forest eyes began at once to seek out the dark corners of the house.

"Why the appalling silence, neighbour?" she asked.

Ig, still undecided but badly flustered, made no answer. Then Toto Shag perceived in the corner where it still lay the upper piece of Ig's late wife, and tittered.

There is such a thing as tittering at the wrong time and in the wrong place. And there is such a thing as tittering once too often. Toto Shag had committed all three of these solecisms.

Ig, perceiving that in a few moments his inexplicable folly would be common gossip, and almost in tears, grunted:

"I shall have to run amok. It cannot be otherwise."

And he swung the decapitator and smote.

The head of the old lady went hopping and bumping across the floor of the house and the rest of her went tumbling down the ladder, hung balanced for a moment on the landing stage, and then toppled off into the water with a quiet splash.

"Oh, dear—dear—dear!" thought Ig. "Now I *am* in for it."

Pauru, rich and powerful, had not been engaged in warfare for a generation. The Sultan and the war chiefs were fighters by tradition and not by practice. It would not be easy to provoke them into doing him a violence and putting an end to a life which was no longer fit to live, but he intended to do his best.

He first ate the entire bowl of rice and raw fish which the unfortunate Plu had been preparing for their joint morning meal, fed his pigs, dipped up a dozen buckets of salt water and sluiced down the gleaming mahogany floor of their sty, gathered the two pieces of his wife and the head of the old lady together in one place, covered them over with a second best mat, changed his white cotton loin cloth for a fringed one of scarlet silk, cleaned and polished the huge blade of the decapitator, and not without hesitation and embarrassment, for he was a shy man and easily confused, climbed down his house ladder to the landing stage and set off by the forest path for the more fashionable and popular parts of the village.

Ig's way led him past the house of Mr. Kelp the missionary. He knew that it would and he hoped that the missionary, who was forever pestering him about his gods and urging him to

change them, as lightly as you change breech cloths, wouldn't put in an appearance. But the missionary had a fenced-off yard in which he practised horticulture, and here Ig perceived him from afar doing woman's work with a hoe.

Ig sighed and hoped that he could get through his business with the missionary without any preliminary conversation, but even this hope was to be blasted.

Mr. Kelp perceived Ig, and approaching the fence leaned on it and accosted him.

"Why the best silk loin cloth and the great sword?"

Ig explained as best he could.

"I have divided my wife, Plu, into two parts," he said, "and the shame of it caused me in sheer desperation to sever the head of our respected neighbour, Toto Shag, from her body, and now my hand is raised against all men so that presently the hands of all men will be raised against me until the misery and confusion which I have brought upon myself may be ended forever."

So saying he swiped suddenly sidewise at Mr. Kelp the missionary; but that one ducking madly evaded the blow and fled squealing for his house, with Ig, who had leaped the fence, bounding at his heels and swinging the decapitator.

It had been part of Mr. Kelp's policy in dealing with native populations to plant in them the belief that his own particular bodily integrity and welfare were the particular and peculiar preoccupation of the gods whom he served and recommended, and Ig, therefore, had some reason to believe that his own death would be the instant result of killing or even harming the missionary. And so he pursued Mr. Kelp with all the zeal of a fanatic who seeks to deliver himself from oppression.

Mr. Kelp plunged into his house through the front door, which he sought to slam in the face of his pursuer, and almost instantly plunged out of it through the back. The frame of the latter caught the edge of the decapitator and saved him for the moment. He zig-zagged then, darted out at his front gate and fled with incredible speed along the forest paths toward the village. But his wind was not good, and if the gods whom he served and recommended really valued him it soon became high time for them to interfere in his behalf. His stride began to weaken and falter. He stubbed his foot against a stubborn root, fell, scrambled squealing to his feet,

lost his left arm at the shoulder and, an instant later, his head.

"And now," thought Ig with a sudden smile of relief, "my troubles are all over."

He stood breathing heavily, and wondered from what direction the doom, which he felt certain the gods of the white man were about to visit upon him, would approach.

But after half an hour of patient and hopeful waiting it began to appear as if the late missionary had perhaps exaggerated the importance in which he was held by his gods, or that these, owing to the multiplicity of their heavenly engagements, had been too much occupied to notice his dismemberment and subsequent decapitation.

"He was wrong about this," Ig thought. "Maybe he was wrong about everything."

He sighed and walked slowly out of the forest and into the very heart of town.

"I've got to find somebody who'll put an end to all this misery," he thought, and he stood and looked about him.

In the shade of a Bo tree a number of the Sultan's children, among them the heir apparent, were squatted on the ground and playing at jackstraws. The heir apparent was a nervous, vicious child, who continually accused the littler children of cheating and slapped them right and left. He resembled his father, the Sultan, as closely as one mango resembles another. But his voice, shrill, querulous, and incessant, was his mother's.

Ig stood and watched the children. A number of grown persons came out of their houses and perceiving Ig and the great red loper on which he leaned, forgot the business which had brought them out and went back in. Only the king's children, intent upon their game, did not notice him.

One of the adults who had come out of his house and hastily gone back in was the chief of the Sultan's war council. This able military expert now by the simple process of cutting an opening through the back of his house and thereafter crawling on his stomach for a hundred yards succeeded in gaining the Sultan's palace and the Sultan's ear.

"Ig, the strong man," said the chief of council, "is without, watching the royal children at play. He is leaning on the two-handed sword which his ancestor brought together with two

princesses from an island to the southward. The sword is stained with blood. And I am of the opinion that Ig, the strong man, has gone mad and that he is running amok. More particularly I fear for the life of the heir apparent, upon whom the attention of the madman appeared to be more particularly focussed than on the other children."

"It is a pity," said the Sultan, "that I have this very morning sent the army back into the forest where the river is only a spring at the root of a tree, in order to set traps for wild women. We be old men, thou and I. But I would make short work of this fellow Ig if I had my army here."

At that moment there came to them from without a sudden sound of screaming and squealing and wailing. Then there was silence.

"Perhaps," said the chief of the war council, "I had better go after the army and fetch it back."

"Perhaps," said the Sultan, "we should both go. The thought is not an unhappy one. I shall then return at the head of my army and deal with this fellow. It is said that the ancestral sword of Ig is capable, almost of its own accord, of separating the whole into its component parts. We had best quit the palace by the back door."

But at that moment a knocking, firm but respectful, fell upon the front door of the palace and the two old men who had risen to their feet shivered and listened. The knocking was repeated.

"Stay where you are," commanded the Sultan suddenly, "and say what you have to say."

"Sultan of Pauru," came the answer, "I am Ig the strong man, and because of the shame and confusion occasioned by being lost in a red mist and coming out of it to discover that I had divided my lamented wife, Plu, into two parts, I have run amok. I have cut down in her old age Toto Shag, who was our nearest neighbour, and who perceiving that there was silence in our house after eight years of scolding and fault-finding came to inquire the cause. I have lopped off the left arm of the white missionary at the shoulder, and his head at the neck. At this juncture his gods failed him, and always in the hope of inciting others to do me a fatal violence I came and stood for a time watching the royal children at play under the Bo tree. But it is very horrible for a man like me to have

to go on living. Wherefore in the sure belief that you will order out the army and cause me to be shot down like the worthless dog that I am, I have brought you the head of the heir apparent. . . .”

But the two old men had long since tiptoed to the back door of the palace and made their way silently into the forest.

Ig sighed, and after knocking a couple more times, and repeating, though listlessly and without much hope, the detailed narrative of his amok, abandoned himself to the languorous noon heat and sat down in the shade to rest.

Then he remembered that his pigs had not been fed that morning and he started up and hurried home. Just because he had made a horrible mess of his life was no reason why the pigs should suffer. They were affectionate, trusting pigs of which he had always been justly proud.

Certain other chores delayed his return to the village. Blue-bottles were making free in his house, and it seemed best to row the head of Toto Shag and the pieces of his wife far out on the estuary and dump them overboard. Running amok is often a slow business and he might have need of his house for several days and nights longer. Between killings a man likes to eat and bathe, to rest on a heap of mats, and once in a while to change his clothes. Between killings a man likes to have some place to go, and as the old Pauru saying has it, “Home is best.”

So Ig cleaned house, and leaving a lighted stick of Chinese incense to sweeten it during his absence, returned to the village. The news of the amok which he was running was now, however, common gossip, and except for the pigs and fowls the inhabitants of Pauru seemed all to have fled. It is true that a “lifer” stared at Ig through the barred window of the Sultan’s prison, and he seemed to hear soft incantations as he passed close to the house of the priest. But of persons who might be expected to stand up and fight or to revenge themselves for the loss of kith and kin there were none.

In their headlong flight the villagers had abandoned so many articles of value that if Ig had gathered them together and made off with them he would have been a rich man. But he was too much preoccupied with the business of procuring his own death at the hands of someone other than himself to think of worldly matters.

Fowls cackled and scratched in the mould. Pigs suffering from hunger and the presentiment that they had been abandoned disturbed the peace.

Baffled by the turn which matters had taken, Ig, after much aimless wandering in and out of houses and among them, pushed open the door of the Sultan's palace and strolled from room to room, from storehouse to storehouse, from shed to shed, and from compound to compound. But it was in a remote shed at the back of everything that he found the wild woman.

Her cage of heavy malacca, one of a long row of similar cages, was the only one which happened at the moment to be occupied.

She was a little, young thing. And at first glance she seemed to consist entirely of a pair of huge dark forest eyes. Such eyes are usually associated with suffering and emaciation, but the tiny creature's arms and legs and breasts were as round and firm as they were delicate and shapely. A knee-length petticoat of scarlet silk set off her rich brown colouring and the shadow of the shed was a sop to the Pauru idea of convention and modesty. She was no more than fourteen or fifteen years of age.

She must have been a long time in the cage, being prepared for the Sultan's harem, for her first words proved that for a wild woman she had managed to acquire a very unusual command of the difficult Pauru dialect.

"I've been looking for you," she said. "I heard all about you while the Sultan's wives were packing up and getting ready to leave. I suppose you know that nothing would so infuriate the Sultan as my death at your hands. What you don't know is that nothing would please me better. I am sick of this cage, and I had rather die than enter the harem of a snuffy and mangy old man."

"With one blow," said Ig, "I could cut through the malacca bars and you, too."

"Don't I know that?" said the wild woman. "To look at you is sufficient. I never saw such muscles."

Ig, the strong man, blushed and stammered in his confusion.

"But before you do it," said the wild woman, and now he saw nothing of her but her eyes, "I do wish you would tell me just what you did to make your life seem no longer worth

living. At least you weren't in a cage. At least you weren't being trained and educated for a life of shame."

"I was living happily enough at the time," said Ig, "if you really want to know."

And forthwith, eager perhaps for a word or two of human sympathy, he launched out and told her the whole story from the beginning.

When he had finished, the vast forest eyes of the wild woman appeared to be very soft and melting.

"Do you know what *I* think!" she said, and she brushed her eyes with the back of her hand. "*I* think you have been horribly misunderstood."

Ig sighed. And his liver, which among the Pauruans is the seat of the affections, warmed toward the wild woman.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Plepilune."

"Well, Plepilune," he said, "there are all kinds of women in the world. But you are different."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "how I boil at the thought of all the injustice that you have suffered!"

"And I," said he, "at the thought of a woman like you being shut in a cage and prepared for a life of shame."

"Just think of a woman scolding a man like you steadily for eight years! It's no wonder that you divided her into two parts at the end of them!"

"If I'd ever had a single word of sympathy and appreciation. . . ."

"Some people," said Plepilune, "don't ever meet. Others meet when it is too late." A pair of tears almost big enough to match her eyes ran down her cheeks. Ig wondered what she meant.

"But I don't think that killing your wife ought to worry you," she said presently. "There ought to be a death penalty for scolds. We have it in the forest. And as for Toto Shag—well, have you ever considered what a lot of money it costs to keep perfectly worthless old women alive? There's two deaths at least for which the community ought to be grateful."

"But the white man and the heir apparent . . ." protested Ig.

"Do you think it's a pretty thing to go out of your way to insult other people's gods and try to make them change

them?" asked Plepilune. "Because I don't. And in the forest we have a death penalty for just that sort of thing. The heir apparent was a spoiled brat. He was only eleven years old, but he was continually boasting about the wild women he was going to capture and have in his harem when he grew up. And now. . . ."

"But," said Ig, "all that you say is doubtless true enough. You are wiser than I. But I don't for the life of me see how your death could benefit anybody."

"Or my life—in a cage."

"I will get you out of the cage in two shakes of a pig's tail. Crouch in the corner."

She crouched, and Ig hewed away the opposite corner of the cage with a single swish of the decapitator.

Plepilune came out of the cage and, reaching up, she tried to clasp Ig's huge biceps with her little hand.

"I think," said she, "that you must be the strongest man in the world. I don't see why you should be so earnest to get yourself killed. I don't think you've done anything to be ashamed of."

"Who now," said Ig, "would ever think of me without laughing? Who now would give me his daughter to replace the wife that I have lost?"

"There's such a thing—I have heard of such things in the forest—as a daughter giving herself. But unless you intend to go on living and to fulfill your obvious destiny she would be all kinds of a fool to give herself to you."

"My obvious destiny?" asked Ig, his forehead all knotted with bewilderment.

"Take me to the throne room, and I will tell you what I mean."

The Sultan of Pauru has a throne of teak and ivory with a canopy of choice feathers. Plepilune made Ig stand with his back to the throne. She wanted to show him something, she said. Then she gave him a sudden push in the stomach which caused him to double up and sit down. Then she cried:

"Don't move! You look wonderful—*too* wonderful!"

And all at once, as if pressed down by the wonderfulness of him sitting there, she sank to her knees and bent over forward until her forehead was pressing his foot.

Ig blushed with embarrassment. But the toes of his foot curled with pleasure.

From her low obeisance the wild woman rose slowly and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Your obvious destiny," she said, "is to be Sultan of Pauru. . . . Now don't contradict me!"

"But," objected Ig, "the Sultan—the real Sultan—will return in a few days at the head of the army."

"In the meanwhile," said Plepilune, "we shall go from house to house feeding the abandoned pigs and gathering up the eggs as the fowls lay them. When the Sultan returns at the head of the army they will be two hundred men who have no wish to die pitted against one man who so far as they know has no wish to live, and who furthermore is the strongest man in the world and the most skilful at hacking."

Ig was silent for a long time. His slow mind was actually working. A glimmer of personal ambition was in his eye.

"The victory," said Plepilune, "would rest with you."

Another silence.

"Besides *yours*," then said Plepilune, "there is only one real brain in the whole of Pauru. Blabu—the priest."

"He did not flee with the others."

"He counts upon the gods whom he serves and recommends and even insists on. He only is dangerous to you. He is a plotter, a greedy self-seeker. . . . As for his gods, they are made of wood and brass and wouldn't hurt a rabbit unless they fell on it. . . . Shall I wait here for you?"

Ig went, and after a time returned carrying the head of the priest.

"Good," said Plepilune. "And now there remains only the prisoner in the prison and the madmen in the House of Skulls. You had best spare the prisoner for the present as he may be useful to you, but the madmen will always be mad, and it is a lot of trouble to feed them and expensive besides."

In a little while Ig returned. But this time he kept rubbing the palm of his right hand.

"There were a good many of them," he said, "and I think I have got what is called a stone bruise."

"Let *me* see."

She lifted his palm close to her face.

"Is *that* where it hurts?"

"Yes."

She pressed her lips to the spot and thereafter laughed softly.

Ig stood looking at her and the red colour mounted under his brown skin to his eyes. He had difficulty in saying what he wanted to say. At length he succeeded in blurting it out.

"No parent," he said, "after all that has happened would ever entrust a daughter to my keeping. . . . But awhile ago you said something about a daughter giving herself, and. . . ."

"Of course," said Plepilune, "she would never give herself to a man who was going to insist on having a whole harem of other women, too."

"Of course not," said Ig.

After a long silence he reached forth his left hand and covered her soft, firm shoulder with it. When he spoke his voice trembled. "It's a promise," he said.

How Ig and Plepilune fed the village pigs and gathered the village eggs and kept house in the palace, with the prisoner, who proved to be a jack of all trades and a jewel of a fellow, to help them, is too long a story to tell now. It is enough to say that it is a love story of the first water.

It was interrupted by the return of the Sultan with his army—not, as he had threatened, at its head, but at its end.

Ig and Bodo, the ex-prisoner, waited for them in the open space in front of the palace. And Plepilune climbed into the top of the Bo tree and looked on.

The moment the army came filing out of the forest, bristling with spears and muskets and bright with purple turbans and scarlet trousers, Ig and Bodo gave voice to the most bloodcurdling cries imaginable and ran right at it.

If anybody received the volley which the army fired before it turned and fled it was the sun, who looked down on the battle from his place in the heavens. The only person endangered was Plepilune. She got to laughing so hard that she nearly fell out of the Bo tree.

Ig and Bodo ran after the army as fast and as far as they could run. They ran until here and there in the forest they began to come across weapons and even pairs of scarlet trousers which it had discarded to increase its mobility; and

then they would have given up if they had not perceived just ahead of them an aged line officer who was swiftly disappearing into a hole in the ground.

They were just in time to get him by the feet and pull him out. In order to expedite his flight the aged line officer had discarded everything and was as naked as a young crow, so before conducting him into the presence of Plepilune they made him a girdle of leaves and assured him that he looked perfectly presentable.

Plepilune had a long, private talk with the old man, while Ig and Bodo slept off the fatigues of the battle and of the pursuit. And while she gave the old man his instructions she won his confidence with roast pork and fresh eggs.

When Ig and Bodo waked, the old man, nicely dressed and confident of a rosy future, had gone back into the forest.

Three days later he returned to Pauru with the army at his back and the head of the late Sultan dangling from his hand.

Ig and Plepilune and Bodo came out of the palace, and the old chief, whose name was Kerd, lined up the army.

Ig stood on the top step of the palace. Plepilune stood on the other step and Bodo on the ground.

The army threw its spears and its muskets into a heap at the feet of Ig, and Kerd, the old officer, threw the head of the ex-Sultan on the top of the heap.

Then they asked Ig to be their new Sultan and reign over them, and he said that he would. Then he made a little speech, with Plepilune prompting him in whispers, and he told them that everything was going to be altogether different and better from now on, but that any time that his orders were not carried out promptly and efficiently he would reserve the privilege of running amok.

As a matter of fact, Ig rules wisely and well and is a faithful husband to Plepilune. Now that Blabu the priest is dead, Plepilune is fond of saying that her husband's is the only real brain in Pauru, and not even old Kerd, who is chief of council, would care to contradict a lady.

Sometimes, when Ig and Plepilune are alone together, they speak of the amok which Ig ran in the old days. But in public this period of Ig's misery and confusion is always referred to as "The Revolution."

THE ANGLO-SAXON

BY WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

From Harper's

WE HAD been trying to wear out the Newfoundland fog in a corner of the smoking saloon, the Doctor, the Tinsmith, the Yankee Consul, and I; and the talk had got to grips somehow with the old argument of heredity *versus* environment in the shaping of a human career. The Doctor (to my surprise) held for environment; the Tinsmith (as unexpectedly) for the blood. Before I had had a chance to air my convictions the Yankee Consul took the word.

"There's a certain fellow I'm thinking of, and I've no doubt you've all known him more or less, here and there. This fellow is a Britisher—abovedecks an Englishman, belowdecks a Scot. You know him: worships the God and the marmalade of the street where he was born and maybe never sees it after he's fourteen—the kind that takes to the sea, and always has, and gobbled up the globe in the process—gray-sandy-red-headed, thin-beaked, moderate-spoken, thoroughly proper to his deathbed about his nails and his tea and his king. That's the man! Well, gentlemen, if there's one man in the world you'd bank on to hang to the habits and morals his father gave him—hang like grim disaster, Equator or Pole—if there's one, gentlemen, I think you'll agree I've described him."

The Doctor nodded and so did I; I know the breed. The Consul knocked out his pipe and told this tale.

When I first went out in the service (and that was a good many years ago) it was to take the broom-and-waste-basket job in our consulate at Tunis on the Barbary Coast. At

Liverpool, where I'd expected to catch a steamer for Marseille, I was offered a quicker and cheaper chance on a cargo boat leaving direct for Tunis on the following tide.

It was my first trip on a British merchantman, but it wasn't my last; I'll take the opportunity to-day when it's offered me. My stateroom off the cabin was larger and cleaner than I should have found on a P. & O., at my price; the food was plain, but plenty and good; the table talk (I messed with the ship's five officers) was as full of meat as I've ever found it at the captain's table in a Cunarder—and a good sight fuller, let me say.

In each of those five men, from the second engineer up to the captain, I found something to take my interest or my liking. It's the captain, though, that I'm going to talk about. He is the "hero" of the tale.

He was young; I'd hate to say how young, for they're deceiving. Young enough, anyhow; even though it was his first voyage with master's papers (as it was also his first trip east in any capacity in any ship). Young enough, at any rate, to make an American college graduate wonder.

His name was Abel Diplo. I've already described him. He didn't *conform* to the type; he *was* it. I'll ask you to mark that well.

I said "interest or liking." It was my interest Diplo took, partly because the breed was new to me and partly because, at first, he didn't appeal to the other thing. In the breed there are subbreeds; there are, naturally enough, Covenanters and Cavaliers. Diplo was the Covenanter. Character! there you had him. He was not a "gentleman." Eating once a day, going to night class, keeping his collars clean and shaving close—that was what had brought him to where he was, and at an age that would have made a "gentleman's" son turn green. Rock-ribbed, cold-blooded, Anglo-Saxon do-it-or-die! You'll begin to see why I say that at first he didn't much appeal to the other thing.

"You must have come down pretty straight from the Ironsides," I took him up one night. It was a moonlight night off the coast of Spain and we were lounging after dinner on the bridge.

"I?" said he. He gave me a queer look.

"Well, I was just thinking—you don't seem to have any

of the vices. Now this very business of turning down your glass at table——”

“Do you know why I do that, Mr. Gore? Will you have a look down there on the fore-castle head. That’s why! *That* sort of thing!”

I looked and saw what he was pointing at,*the ship’s two “characters,” Old Perce and Happy Days, both of them deep in the bottle again. I knew them well by this time. They infested the decks; “infested” is the only word. I had wondered more than once how any self-respecting commander could have held his hand from dumping them both overboard the first day out.

They were as alike as they were inseparable, equally dirty, equally insolent, equally drunk. The only way you could tell them apart was that Happy Days had rings in his ears—funny old copper rings with jade beads. Happy Days was what a hard life had left of an old black bobtailed monkey. Old Perce was what the same had left of a sailorman. I can still see them there, huddled in the moonlight on the fore-castle head, digesting their tipples in private, dreaming their dreams, scheming their schemes—two wrinkled, rum-soaked castaways.

“*That* sort of thing!” repeated Diplo. He sounded angry. “I am young, sir; I have only myself to depend upon; I can see the work of drink. That man down there, sir, once commanded a brig. Not much of a craft, perhaps—matter of a hundred tons or so, in the Mediterranean trade—but his own. And now look at him! Old Perce! The lowest, the wickedest man in the world. Imagine! He has a son, a friend of mine back there in Liverpool (else he wouldn’t be in this vessel, make sure of that). That son, by his own will and work, is beginning to do well. Now sir, can you fancy a man being jealous of the success of his own son? Meanly jealous, drunkenly, cursingly jealous? . . . No, Mr. Gore, if you talk to me of table beer, all I can say to you is—‘Old Perce!’”

Now, gentlemen, you can admire St. George to almost any extent, and even pay well for a seat at the dragon fight—as a spectacle. But when it comes to an after-dinner cigar or a story to swap, you’d probably do as I did after that and pick on the second officer or one of the engineers. And so I sup-

pose I should have gone on to this day remembering Diplo (if at all) as a kind of unbudgable, undintable, all-self-sufficient brand of Cromwell in a suit of armour, if I hadn't happened by the sheerest accident one night to discover that the armour wasn't Diplo at all.

This is how it was. I'd been noticing, anyway, for perhaps the last third of the voyage, that Diplo wasn't looking quite up to snuff. Nothing to wonder at, seeing it was his first command, and, still more, his first trip to African waters at all. I put it down to that, I suppose, and still should do so if it hadn't been for that sheerest chance.

It was the evening of the night when we were looking to make our landfall off the Tunis Gulf, just turning dark, I remember, and I was taking a prow around the deck for my digestion, when I happened to come on Diplo tucked out of the way behind a lifeboat amidships, and being actively and violently sick as a dog over the side. Seasick, I give you my oath! And the water as smooth as a pond of oil. And the captain of the ship!

Well, I stopped. Who wouldn't? I suppose I looked like an idiot, poking my head around the boat's stem. He saw me, and I couldn't tell from his suffering eyes whether he wanted to lay his head on my shoulder or wring my neck.

"Is there anything," I hemmed and hawed—"anything I can do?"

He didn't answer. He got himself up and out from behind the boat, and, grabbing hold of my wrist (to my dumfounding), he dragged me, literally dragged me, to his cabin under the bridge. He shut the door tight, pulled the hanging over the port, sat down on his bunk in the dark, and shook. Shook!

"Good Land of Liberty!" said I. "What's up?"

Never a word. In another wink he was on his feet, grabbing the door open again, rushing out. I went out, too, to go on with my constitutional; but it wouldn't do. He had me going. After one round I turned up the ladder to the bridge. I found him standing out in the starboard wing, taut as a wire, his hands grabbed behind him, his eyes on the horizon beyond the bows. Scared! Scared, I thought to myself, to his shame, of making his first port in command. But still I had to give him a chance.

"You didn't tell me, Mr. Diplo——"

"Ah? You know the tone. The fool was trying to cover up."

"What was wrong?" I finished it out.

"*That!*" he exploded. He stuck out an arm as long as a bean pole at the shadow line between the sky and the sea.

"*That! That—Africa!*"

"Yes," I said, after a minute. "Yes, I think I know, now, what you mean. I've had it myself, a little. It's—it's just the kind of feeling of it's not being real—the old romantic pictures coming back from your geography days—and your *Arabian Nights*, eh?—sheiks and pampered mares, remember, and the Sahara and the domes under the palms and the veiled women—those old dreams——"

The fellow was on me in a flash.

"Did you ever *dream?*"

"Not," said I, taking another look at those pupils of his, "like *that*."

"I'd forgot," I heard him saying to himself. "I'd quite forgot, until the other day at the Straits, I saw the coast, and knew that it was *it*."

"What?"

He gave me a funny shivery look, and then he put his elbows down on the rail and turned his eyes the other way. It isn't often you'll catch a Puritan peeling off the crust of his immortal soul to any one below the angels: he didn't want to, but he had to, all the same

"When I was a lad," he said, "a curious thing happened. I don't know a great deal about it. I only know that I must have been taken to the theatre by some person who ought to have known better, at an age when taking me was a wicked crime. Or perhaps I may have been ill without their knowing it—some little hidden baby fever that made things dazzle a bit too bright. I don't know. I don't even know what the play was about. All I can remember is one scene, and I can remember that as plainly to-night as—as if it *were* to-night. On one side there was a moonlit city wall with half of a vast gate filled with shadow. Before the gate was a square all white dust in the moonlight. Across it, parallel with my sight, a row of palm trees filed away along a road running as straight as a ruler to the end of the world across a dry, pale

plain with little wrinkled hills against the sky. . . . Glue and cardboard and painted canvas? Yes, but how was I to know? How was I to know?

"And the camels—I suppose there were three or four moth-eaten chaps that came out of the wings—but always after I remembered them, in those nights I lay awake or dreamed, coming by hundreds out of that distance down that painted road, grunting and bubbling and stinking and tinkling their little bells, and groaning down on their knees in the dust. And the hooded men that came with them, the veiled women, the blackamoor thumping a drum under the arch, the ragged old beggar that ran with incense through the crowd—Adelphi supers in muslin, yes, yes—but *how was I to know?*"

He was silent a moment, his chin nested in his hand.

"Yes, I must have been ill when I saw the thing; for always afterward when that nightmare came sneaking to take me I remember the same sensation of discomfort, the same itching, gnawing, wailing wretchedness. It weighed me down with a terror I cannot name—the same terror, I suppose, that any English lad would feel for a thing heathenish, diseased, and unclean. And the worst of that loathing was that I *wanted* the thing. I *wanted* to go—go and creep into the silly scene and lie in the dust under one of those cardboard palms and crinkle my toes and hear the camels grunting, the boom of the black man's drums, the rustling of those outlandish moonlit robes, the gasps of veiled women as I reached out to touch their naked ankles, and all—all! I wanted it, craved it, craved the sweet stink of that incense in my nostrils again—lusted for it! I was so terrified I cried out loud—and all the while I *lusted!*"

He had hold of the rail, trying to twist it off the ship.

"I'd forgot! Till to-night! Till now!" His voice had gone to a whisper. There was sweat on his forehead, and somehow I knew he was nauseated again. "I lusted! I grew. I changed. As I changed the dream changed. I didn't reach up to touch the ankles of those veiled women any longer; they gave me secret signs, and I got up out of the dust to follow them—every night—in through that vast gate—through that city—into their red-lit rooms—red-lit and secret and heavy with perfumes. I—I—I say, sir, do you make out a flash on the skyline there, almost dead ahead?"

"No," said I, looking where he had pointed.

"Mr. Gore," he went back, "my whole boyhood was a fight against that sickening thing. But I did fight it—till I bled, till I almost died. I fought it and I beat it and it was gone, and I had forgot. . . . I say, that *is* a light . . . Mr. Andrews!"

The first officer was behind us.

"Coming, sir," he said. "Cani Isles Light a half point on the port bow, sir, and five bells struck. We should be in the Gulf by one."

I looked away at the tiny flash (I could see it now that I knew it was there) and then back again at Diplo. He had his fingers over his eyes, his temples pinched between his thumbs.

"I'd forgot!" I heard him saying to himself. "Forgot!"

It particularly wanted diversion, that moment did. Something light. It got it, too, and from a quarter where no one looked—under our very noses, that is to say. It was Perce and the ape on the forecastle head. The funny old fool had got his carcass balanced on the capstan drum (and not balanced too well, at that) with the monk on his shoulder aloft, and there he swayed in a kind of beery majesty with an oratorical arm ahead.

"*Hafrica!*" we heard him solemnly pronouncing, "*Hold Hafrica—'ome of shplendour and delight—Hi shlute thee!*"

It was ridiculous enough; I didn't know, though, whether to laugh or not. I didn't have to wait long to find out.

"*Get below!*" I heard Diplo roaring. He had his body three feet over the bridge rail and his arm and fist another yard on that, and I wish you could have seen his face. "Get below, you rotten drunkard!" he yelled. "Get out of my sight, you blasphemous, vile drunkard, you! *Go below!*"

It was the finest thing in the world for Diplo; it set him on his feet, clear headed again, captain of his ship and his soul. You would have known it, to hear that "*Go below!*"

But Old Perce didn't go below. He got himself and Happy Days off the forecastle head all right, and fast enough, but it was only to hide out under the bridge. I know, because I was the first that happened to go down, and I was the one to catch it in the neck. He fell on me, literally, and literally, for a moment, I couldn't get away. I batted at his hands, but they'd been batted at before. His gin-pickled dignity had

been tampered with; his boozy pride was hurt; he had words to say; he clung; he puffed; he bubbled in my face.

"Called me a drunkard, did 'e? Called me a rotten drunkard, did 'e? Christ blind me if I don't pay 'im out for that! God le'me live till the day Hi see 'im get hisself so bloody drunk he can't stand on 'is bleedin' feet! God le'me live! The pretty toff! The lily-white virgin. The blinkin', bleedin' curate! Wyte! Just you wyte! Wyte till 'is gracious 'ighness gets a taste o' *bokha* into his coffee cup! Wyte till 'is prunes-an-prisms has a whiff o' the incense in the striped *souk*! Wyte till he see the girls in Bou Kader's shop up there! . . . Called the hold man a drunkard, did 'e! . . . Wyte! . . . Wyte!"

You'd think then that I should have known. But I didn't. I was too blown and rum steamed and generally contaminated getting clear of him to think of putting as plain a two and as plain a two as that together—not for another twenty hours, at any rate. And in another twenty hours we were all ashore and up to our necks in Islam.

Up to our necks? Over our heads! At least *I* was. I've lived twenty-odd years in Barbary ports, first and last, eleven of them in that same screeching, scratching, jostling, jumbling dress rehearsal of a three-coloured moving picture of a highly perfumed circus of a White Tunis, but I've never forgotten that day when I saw it new.

We drifted. There were three of us: Diplo (I'd picked him up at the old sea gate), a fellow named Maynard, from Melrose, Massachusetts, my immediate superior at the consulate, and myself. Maynard was doing the honours of the sights, but, Lord love you! I saw no "sights." All I saw was a daze and a maze of an endless rabbit warren of a bazaar crammed with outlandish creations on two legs or four legs, all colours of the rainbow, all stench from filth to hyacinth, all muck and silk and copper and clatter and hullabaloo. I simply followed where I was led, looking like an idiot (I've no doubt) with my eyes bogged out and my mouth open for marvel of it—of it, and of Diplo.

After his panic of the night before he had me guessing to-day. *His* mouth wasn't open, not a bit of it. His stalk was the stalk of the British tourist seasoned by five continents. He said "deucedly amusing," and "not half." He said,

"filthy beggars," of the men, and as for those mysterious "veiled women" he had talked so much about—"jolly curious, eh?" was all he could say for the slipper-slappers to-day. He carried it off to perfection, with only the least little punky yellow look around the gills if any one wanted to look close enough for that.

Even when we came into that old arched-over vault of the perfume sellers' *souk*. I guess I must have loafed away a good many more than a hundred afternoons in that place since, and if there's any Christian honesty left in me, it's by luck and the grace of God. For if there's a spot for a man to sit on his spine and dream his soul sweetly down the rosy road to hell, it's that spot there. It's always in a sort of twilight, like a cathedral, and along the striped walls the merchants sit cross-legged in their niches like idols in ivory with their tapers and crystals of attars and essences hung around. And the air is soaked and drugged: musk and amber, chypre and hyacinth for the *harem*; incense and myrrh and wax tapers for the mosque. I tell you it's like music—one full, rich, drowsy, voluptuous tone—one chord of piety and lust.

God and flesh in a perfume. Pretty thought, eh? Well, I had it. I got it through my nose. And standing there, I had one of those flashes that come sometimes. "Why," said I—"why—*this* is *Diplo*!" And then in still another flash, I remembered the old tippler's word about the "whiff of incense in the striped *souk*."

I gave Diplo a studying look out of the corner of an eye. His face was a mask: that is to say, it looked as natural as life; he had his hands in his pockets and his cap raked back.

"What do you make of it, Captain?"

"Jolly picturesque!" He slid his tongue along his lip. "Jolly!"

That's all the jolt I got out of that. Another was on the way, though. I know now that Old Perce had been following us all along, but none of us knew it then, and when he came bursting out of the bed-auction crowd at the upper end of the *souk*, rolling like a tub in a seaway, crimson, gorgeous, eyes cocked, arms akimbo, monk aloft, it was jolt enough, I say.

None of us noticed him, of course; we all stood perfectly

still, all praying to luck and liquor to carry him by. It was a close thing. One close-hauled tack was bringing him dead on top of us when another lurch and gybe brought him clear and sent him caroming against the legs of a couple of Arab gentlemen across the way.

They were really gentlemen, you know; fine old silk-and-ivory aristocrats of the True Faith, standing there innocently, hand in hand.

There was nothing violent. They merely withdrew their skirts a little from the contamination, and one of them said three words.

Maynard grinned. "Pig, he called him. 'Pig and father of a pig!'"

I wish you could have seen Diplo's face.

"What?" he gasped. "*What?*" he choked.

"That's right: '*Hallouf-bou-hallouf*'—'Pig-father-pig'! Serves him right, too; darn well right. By the way, Captain, if he's one of yours——"

He never finished. The old Arab had just put the only logical period at the end of his epithet; laying aside his cheek cloth, he spit calmly and truly in the sailor's face.

Maynard saw Diplo before I did and got hold of his arm, and he told me afterward it was lucky he did. I turned just in time to see the man's eyes. And it was in that wink that the lightning struck me.

"Lord! Lord!" was all I could think. "Lord! how awful! Father and son!"

It was only a wink. Diplo did get control of those giveaway eyes; he did succeed, that time, in crawling to cover again. Turning on Old Perce, "Get back to the ship!" said he in a tone like a knife, and, giving us all his back, he walked away.

Naturally we followed him, Maynard and I, leaving the old sinner to "get back to the ship"—which you may be sure he didn't do. He was behind us again before we'd gone a hundred yards: I couldn't see him, but I could see Happy Days all right riding over the heads of the crowd. . . . You'll admit the thing had its elements. I couldn't help seeing in back in a mediæval show booth: good son, still staunch, tracked by bad father, still hopeful, through the Gardens of Strange Delight.

Well, as I say, we followed Diplo. We caught up with him. Maynard started in conscientiously to point out more "sights," but he didn't get on very far with that. Very soon I saw him rubbing his chin.

"Gore," said he, holding me back a little, "what's the matter with this man, Diplo? Anything?"

"Not so far as I know," said I.

"H'mmm!" said he.

We walked on behind him, and we had to walk, too; that tourist stalk of his was gone now and he was eating up the ground in straight lines and mathematical corners like a somnambulist in a hurry to reach the edge of the roof. Chin up, cap down, eyes dead ahead—going nowhere. It's no wonder that Maynard, who was supposed to be running the party, began to feel a bit up in the air. After a little more of it he suddenly doubled around and got in front of us.

"Look here," said he, "I guess that's about a day as far as sights go. It's getting dark, anyway, and they're beginning to shut up the *souk*! In another quarter of an hour it'll be dead as door nails here inside the wall. Eh, Captain?"

"Quite right," said Diplo. He stood there as tall as a steeple.

"Well, let's get on out to Frenchtown, then." Maynard took my arm and started cheerily. Then he stopped. "Coming, Captain?"

There was Diplo, stock where we'd left him, covering a yawn.

"Carry along, you two," he called. "I think I'll have just a bit of another turn about, if you don't mind."

"But, Captain," Maynard argued, "take my word there's nothing to see from now on. And besides, you'd get lost at the first turn."

"If you don't mind!"

It was the voice of the mule. Diplo touched his cap with a deadly politeness, wheeled, struck out stiff-legged as a crane, doubled around the nearest alley turning, and disappeared.

Maynard was mystified. He was also good and mad.

"That makes me tired, Gore. Do you know," said he, "what I've a damned good mind to do? . . . But no. I don't want the responsibility. It's not too safe in here after

dark, and he'd be lost after two twists. Come on; we've got to find him."

We went on all right, but we didn't find him. We went at a trot after a minute or so, and we kept trotting in and out and round about through that kennel of a labyrinth. It was dark now and as dead as Maynard had said—as dead as the tomb. I perspired; Maynard perspired worse.

"Look here!" he protested at last, pulling me up. "You brought this fellow along. Tell me what's the matter with him, so I'll know what to do. Is he crazy or is he drunk?"

"He never drinks," said I.

"Doesn't, eh? H'mmm!" He turned his head sharply. "Well, there's somebody that *does*." He pulled me a step out of the way of an elephant shadow that came rocking down one cross run and rolling away up another, Old Perce with the ape up and a gorgeous slant on (and not a quarter as drunk, I began to suspect, as he made out to be).

"Follow him!" said I, making a guess, "and I bet we find our man."

Then I was almost sorry. Maynard gave me a suspicious jerk of the eye and opened his mouth. But then he shut it again and pounded along.

My guess was a bright one. We hadn't turned three corners when we were almost in collision with Diplo himself, standing as straight and as still as a fence post before the wall of a house that had a lantern lighted over the door. Old Perce had passed him and brought up nearer the door, and he was standing with his head cocked, too, listening.

I had to ask Maynard under my breath what it was all about.

"Fête of some kind—wedding or circumcision or what not. Hear the music in there? Hear the women yodelling back there? Wedding, probably."

Old Perce thought so, too. He turned his head and wagged it at the wooden man before us.

"Hit's a weddin', hold son. Blighted Harab weddin'. Nothin' 'olier than a weddin', his there, my 'oly lad? Come along hin!" And, with that, he crooked the arm of invitation, for all the world like an old stager "taking in" the latest "bud."

Diplo didn't hit him. But he surprised me even more than

that. He stuck out one wooden hand, put it on the old man's arm, marched along with him to that open door, and marched inside.

Maynard got to that door in about three jumps, and I wasn't far behind him, scared good and witless by the way he stretched his neck out to see into the hole over the heads that it was full of. But then I heard him breathe again.

"Well, I guess it's all right, Gore. I know this man—he's a courier at the Dutch consulate—and he knows me. In we go!"

We picked our way through a dense odour in a kind of entry-way and came out into a square court roofed with a striped awning, and so full of light that it dazzled after the dark. A dazzle and a daze. All I knew for the first while was that an Arab man with round whiskers (that was Si Mahmud, our host: he shifted to our shop later on and I came to know him well) cleared out a place for Maynard and me on one of the foremost benches and put a cup of coffee in my hand.

Have any of you ever looked in on an Arab's wedding carouse? If you have you'll know. They're all pretty much the same; same sardine pack of males in coats of many colours and red *chechias* tipping farther and farther over their ears as the evening grows; same bridegroom, painted like a harlot, seated by the same mysterious door; same plank rostrum in the court; same gang of hashish-lighted musicians, funny fiddles, *taboukas*, melodeons, flutes; same fat white dancing girls, twisting and clanking and sweating through the same unvarying dance (the dance, by the way, most sumptuously and brazenly symbolical of the particular occasion); same drugged air full of staling perfumes, cigarette smoke, sickly syrups, syrupy coffee—such as I still held grabbed in my hand.

"You've got to taste it, anyhow," Maynard warned in my ear.

It was burnt and sticky, but down it went.

"I thought," he went on, "that you said your friend didn't drink."

"He doesn't. Where is he?"

Maynard pointed him out, plain enough, sitting chums

with Old Perce in the forepart of the benches opposite. He had a little tumbler in his fist.

"But that looks like water," I protested.

"So does gin. But gin's a baby to that stuff, *boka*, there."

"I always thought, somehow, that Mohammedans were forbidden——"

"Ho, ho! So are Christians, too. Ha, ha! . . . That's the Captain's second round of that fig juice, and if he's not used to liquor, Lord help him before long."

"Lord help him already!" was what came to me. It showed in his eyes. They were taking on a stare, a kind of a ground-glass stare, that picked out one thing and glued on to it and couldn't seem to let go.

I looked to see what it had hold of now—and then I began to understand. It was an Arab on the bench in front of him, a place or so to the left, a youngish fellow in Egyptian fez and London-tailored tweed (they were both coming in then with a certain set of the Moslem dandies) and altogether the air of the man-about-town in New Tunis. But what got me about this fellow, and knocked all my old ideas gally-west (and Diplo's, too, I gather) was that this Mohammedan boulevardier was as blond as Abel Diplo himself—just as straw-headed—just as gray-eyed.

I've seen plenty of them since: it's natural enough when you come to think that the Goths and Vandals wiped up this coast along with the rest of the Roman Empire; but the point was I hadn't then, and Diplo hadn't, either.

Well, I know as well as anything what was going through his poor head, already sick enough with that "itching, gnawing, wailing wretchedness," and still farther twisted with that poison of figs—the despair, the fright, the magicking away of the one last barrier to his old dream: "Here's one of *them*, and God help me! he isn't a blackamoor or a demon or hippogriff at all. He's as like me—he's *so* like me that if I were to change caps with him, there he'd sit an Englishman, and here *I'd* sit——"

I know. I saw him lean over, all of a sudden, right across the monkey in the old man's lap, pick the fez from that startled dandy's pate, and cram it squarely and tightly on his own.

Maynard sat up straight. I felt him.

"That may make trouble." He was watching under his eyelids. "Or again it may not. All according—— Wait! Steady! If they'll only be amused——"

It was nip and tuck for the minute around the cheeky "Christian dog"; even I could see that. But it was hilarity that won—hilarity of fig and feast. One tittered. Another shook the finger of glee at the *roumi* in a Mohammedan hat. Still another, to pile it on, stripped off his own brown *burnous* and threw it over the shoulders of the infidel. It went even farther than that. A youngster hardly over fifteen had Diplo up on his two feet like a window image and towing away through the crowd and into a cave-looking place across the court.

"Nothing to worry about there," Maynard told me (I imagine I must have looked uncomfortable). "That's one of the sons of the house. Going to rig your friend out right, probably; that's all."

It was so. Diplo reappeared, prodded and shunted out between the benches by the delighted son; another Diplo, a gorgeous, silk, soft-slippered Diplo, hypnotized with queer-ness and petrified with drink. Joy broke loose. Hands grabbed at him from all sides. The dancer on the rostrum (a huge white Algerian Jewess she was) caught the spirit of the meeting, turned her batteries on the *roumi*, and danced her dance "at" him alone.

And, gentlemen, if you know what *that* means. Think to yourselves. I said the dance was symbolical. No, *literal*! *Sumptuously* literal!

Can you imagine Diplo—chapel and night-class Diplo—Diplo of the old dragon fight with a red-lit dream—Diplo, fetched up there, head full of *boka* and that screeing, boom-thumped, split-tone heathen tune, silk on his body, hyacinths behind his ears, and his two eyes bulging out to that mocking invitation? Can you imagine?

Well, all of a sudden he started for her. He went slowly, head down between his shoulders, chin out, never a word or sound. . . . It was Old Perce that furnished the music, Old Perce, come to glory at last.

"Carry on, my 'oly hoffspring! Carry on, my virgin lad! Carry on!"

In my other ear I got it from Maynard. "This," said he, "has gone about far enough."

He got out quietly but quickly. He caught the back of Diplo's purple *burnous* just as the crazy fool had got a knee up on the rostrum. I don't know what he said, but I saw the jerk he gave, and I saw the look that Diplo gave him back. . . . Old Perce was throwing the monk in the air: "*Yow! Yow! Yow!*" . . . There was nothing violent. Not in the least. Diplo made up his lips and spit calmly and truly in Maynard's face, that was all.

Then there was a riot. . . . Maynard got to me. He was as white as a dead one, to his lips. "The man's drunk now. I can't touch him now. When he's sobered off he'll fight. *You* will see to that, Gore."

"All right," said I, solemn enough. "But where's he gone now?"

Maynard jumped on a bench at that. He'd got an interest in Diplo now—a personal interest to see that he came through to the day of vengeance alive and whole.

"There!" he yelled. "Out of the door there! Come fast!"

I got behind him. It was football work. Si Mahmud helped us finally, and a worried man he looked. He told me afterward he was happy enough to see us out of there. He couldn't have been any gladder than I was, I know that. I took one good drink of the outside air and started after Maynard down the street.

"Gone this way?" I called.

"Yes, running like an elephant in a tent! Saw him just now!"

Well, we footed along, raising racket enough to wake the dead in that graveyard maze. Maze it was, too. I couldn't count the corners we banged against nor the blind walls that doubled us back on our own trail. Then there was a grunt and a scuffle, and we'd caught a man.

A man and a monkey, too. It was Old Perce, the tightness (or the pretense of it) gone out of his carcass for good. He actually wailed.

"Where's 'e *gone*? Gord forgi' me!" he chattered and he wailed.

"That's the question," said Maynard, "where *has* he gone?"

We stood there in the dark. By and by we began to walk. There was no use running (no use even moving, for the matter of that). Figure for yourselves: there couldn't have been less than two hundred passages in that sepulchre of an old town, all crisscrossed, all blank, all alike, and all as dark as the pit itself. Hunting a needle in a haystack is one thing; hunting a man who doesn't want to be found in an Arab town—a man drunk on a fixed idea—is another.

I can't say how long it was. I only know we walked miles, that I had blisters the size of quarters on my feet, that I hadn't eaten in years, and that, finally, I resigned.

"That's enough!" said I, pulling up. "Let him go hang!"

"No!" said Maynard. "Not for a million dollars I won't."

The old man had been keeping up his "Gord forgi' me!" every minute of the time. Now he put a hand to his head and changed his tune.

"'Ark, sir! 'Ark to me now. What course from 'ere would fetch us quickest to the *Bab Kebir*?"

"*Bab Kebir*? Now what in the name of the silly devil——" Maynard stopped and started to scowl at him. Then he turned his head and cocked his ear the other way. "No," said he, "but hark to *that*!"

There was a row somewhere; something had come to life at last in the town of the dead. A thump and a groan it sounded, far off. . . . Maynard was already on his way. I caught up with him, trailing Perce behind.

We went down this alley and up that one and came to the corner of a lane where there was the beginning of a light. The light came toward us; the thump and groan grew louder, coming, too. Maynard took one look, and then he put out his arms and herded us back into our alley again.

"No," said he. "It's just as well to keep on the safest side there is. Get into this doorway here."

"What's it about?" I had to ask him.

"The *Aissaoui*—the Mohammedan Society of Jesus. Bound home for their mosque, I guess. They've been out to a torture party somewhere. Get back."

They were already on us. A line of torches swung past the alley mouth, ducking to the roll of those narrow drums of theirs and that damned chant mixed up of a cough and a

curse and a groan. I had to peek. I saw them ranked the width of the street, shoulders locked, faces jerked back in the glare and thrown down to their knees again with a perfect surf of their greasy scalp locks whipping the air. Stripped to the waist they were, and their hides looked green. I saw the steel skewers stuck between their ribs and through their necks. Ugh! I don't like them.

Well, on they rolled, three wild and woolly ranks, and behind them a ruck of rooters and hangers-on, going through the same motions of that hellion rite, coughing and moaning and throwing their silly heads.

It was the old tanker that saw. He was out of that door on the jump.

"There! There's my lad! Hi sawr 'im! S'welp me, I sawr 'im, Hi did!"

It was bosh, but he had us craning out of that alley all the same. In another wink he had us on the run. For it wasn't bosh, after all, and he was right as right. At the very fag end of the parade, grunting with the best of them, cracking his knee joints in tune, mouth open, eyes shut, loony as a living loon, was Captain Diplo of the *Graves-end Bars*.

"Nail him!" That was Maynard. Even Maynard—the one of us all who shouldn't have—even Maynard forgot to think.

We nailed him, never doubt. I got him the finest of tackles from the rear, *burnous* and all. Old Perce had an ankle somewhere below. Enough!

That was where the bomb went off. I wish you could have heard the Mohammedan Society of Jesus go up then. And I wish you could have felt it come down. The last I felt was a foot in my neck. The last I saw was stars.

The longer I lived in Barbary the less I could understand why we weren't all *three* laid away. I thought I was at the time, but I woke up. Maynard was over me. Four Zouaves of the patrol were over Old Perce across the way. I got up. I felt me over. Nothing was gone.

Maynard said: "Thank God! That leaves only one."

"Who? What?"

"I'm afraid the old man's got it."

I went over and looked down between the soldiers. One of

them had a bull's-eye, throwing the light on the sailor. One look was enough. He'd got a knife in the wrong place and come to the end of his cruise.

Not quite enough, though. His eyes opened. I got on a knee and put my ear down. He wasn't talking too loud.

"That's *my* son. My *boy*. My name's Diplo, too. Hi'm goin' to 'Ell, but 'e'll make a name o' that. Honly you got to find 'im. Pass me a hoath, mate. Find 'im and get 'im clear o' 'ere. A hoath, mate——"

Perce's eyes closed again. The soldiers took him up, but he was dead.

I tell you, gentlemen, it was queer. Marching out of that dead city in the dead of night, carrying the dead. It was too sudden and tragic and pathetic and plain queer. I couldn't think why; not for a long time.

Then it came to me. It was that old fellow's sudden loneliness.

"Maynard," said I, catching up, "where's the monkey gone?"

"How should I know? Scared cross-eyed over the house-tops, probably. That's not the question, Gore. The question is: where's the *man*?"

"How about the police—or have you told these soldiers? About him?"

"I have not. What good would it do, now he's in with that fellow like poison; if I'm in luck I'll beat him to death one day; but, Gore, I hate to undertake to lose a man his job, with the facts and the hullabaloo. Look here, Gore, I want you to understand this is all bad! Very damn bad!"

Yes, it was. If you'd gone through that night and the next day and another night and another day, you wouldn't forget it was bad.

Every minute of that time was an hour, and an hour's a long time for men with their hands tied and gags in their mouths. All we could do was roam, Maynard and I; roam and stare at walls and chew our hearts to think of our medicine piling up with every one of those minutes, at the *Kasba*, the Residence, the British consulate, our own shop—everywhere we hadn't dared to go, and raise the proper hue the first day, even, finally, the second day.

"There's something; if I could only think!" I remembered

Maynard saying over and over: "My God, if I could only think!"

"This Diplo is dead," he announced, suddenly. "And *we* are in a mess."

That was the second evening. We gave up then. We decided to go to the British consul general bright in the morning, make a clean thing of it, swallow that medicine, and say good-bye to our two careers.

That night I slept. The trouble was that Maynard didn't. He was still trying to think. He had me out at four, in the dark of my hotel.

"Listen, Gore; what was it the old man said? Was it '*Bab Kebir*'?"

"Who? When?" I was sleepy and I was sore. "Look here, it's black early yet. That consulate won't be open for hours."

"It was *Bab Kebir*," he went on with his "thinking." "It's worth a chance. Get into your things."

He took me out in the dark and the cold. There were no hacks at that hour and we had to foot it. He walked me miles around that wall, and he walked me fast. It was almost dawn when we came to the *Bab Kebir*, and that was the first I knew that *Bab* was Gate.

Maynard stopped. I stopped. "Well," said he, "here we are."

"Yes," said I, "here we are. Now what?"

He let go. I don't know what with all his "thinking" he had expected to find, but whatever his fixed idea was, it let him down now with a thud.

"I must have lost too much sleep," was all he could see to say.

"Well, there are hacks now; at least," said I, "we can ride back."

"Give me some coffee first." He put his hand over his middle. He was all gone. There was a *kahwaji* there outside the wall; we sat down on a bench in front, called for coffee, and put our heads in our hands to wait.

Well, I suppose this story would never have been told if I'd *kept* my head there; that is, if I hadn't peeked. Idly, you know, between my fingers. Then I sat up. I think my hair actually did stand on end.

You wouldn't see it nowadays; it's all cluttered up with Maltese drinking shops and French apartments. But this is what I saw then, between my fingers. On my right stood the city wall and the gate, the "vast gate," filled with shadow. Before me, before the gate, spread a square all powdered with white dust. Across the square a row of palm trees ran to pick up a road that lay away straight as a ruler to the world's end—a "painted road across a painted plain" that broke into naked, wrinkled hills against the farthest sky. . . . There it stood between my fingers, coloured to the life in three dimensions, the stage scene of Abel Diplo's dream. Even to the camels. . . . There wasn't any moon, to be sure, but that tricky cold gray before the dawn did well enough for that. There was no blackamoor pounding a drum under the arch, but there were Soudan porters asleep there, and a nomad beggar man that might well enough have run with incense while the moon still shone, and at least one veiled female (an awful skinny old one) early at the fountain under the wall.

Yes, it was all there, gentlemen: even to a *burnous*-bundled Arab snoring in the dust under the tree where Diplo had "lusted" (remember?) to creep and lie and "crinkle his toes." It wasn't Diplo's "show"; it was the cold gray dawn of the morning after, and the "supers from Adelphi" were beginning to stretch and rub their eyes. Some of them kicked the "property camels," and the camels yawned, too, and got their hulks out of the dust, groaning and tinkling their little bells, and began to stretch out along that "painted road"—some little market caravan, I've no doubt, bound for home again behind the Zaghouan hills.

I took my hands down. I suppose I must have been puffing like a pig.

"What's wrong?" Maynard jogged my elbow. "Here's the coffee come. Here! . . . What *are* you staring at?"

I was staring at that *burnous* under the tree. The *burnous*, upended on its inside haunches, was staring at the caravan, staring and scratching its inside head and staring again. And before I knew it, there it was on its legs, shaking out its folds and starting off at a clock-work, sleep-walk jog along that desert road, "painted" for certain now in the red of dawn. And what its folds had shaken out was following at a hop and skip in the dust—a little monkey as black as sin.

Well, I followed, too; it wasn't sleep walking, either, it was a sprint. Happy Days was the first to know. I must have put a foot on his tail; Maynard told me afterward that the little demon let out a yell, looped four loops, and went up a tree. I didn't know. I'd got my hand in that purple *burnous* by that and wrapped three times around for luck.

"Diplo!" said I. Just like that.

He turned and he gave me a look. For one wild wink I'd thought I'd been fooled. The fellow had a knife slash down one temple and cheek, a festering, fly-blown gouge; there was a three days' growth on him and the muck of all Tunis gone to powder in the hair.

If I'd looked for trouble I was mistaken. He stared at me a minute, clapped his eyes shut, opened them up again, gave a shiver, and "Gore!" he said, and that was all. Great round tears squeezed out under his lids. Next thing I knew his face was down on my shoulder, and there he was, crying like the infant babe.

"Maynard," said I, "get a hack."

That's the story, gentlemen. The thing was done and it was finished. Chopped off! I saw him three days later on board his ship, the same straight British merchant captain that had brought her out of the Mersey and would take her back again, not a mark for remembrance on him but that one knife cut, and on his sleeve a ribbon of *crêpe*.

Yes, he'd done that. The ingrained Covenanting conscience of "the street where he was born" had carried him even to that length of honouring publicly in death the filthy old, tipsy old reprobate he hadn't been willing to confess his father, alive.

He took pains to thank me, in two words, without mentioning for what. Then the thing was finished. Finished, done, rooted out, to stay rooted out (so far as I've ever been able to learn) till the end of his days.

That's the story, gentlemen, and if it gives any of you an answer to your question, you're welcome; that's all I can say.

"Environment!" That was the Doctor. "Given Environment A, tried and true! Given Environment B, bang! Algebra!"

The Tinsmith sat as firmly.

"Heredity! If you can't see how it's heredity, given the facts, I can't bother to explain."

"Given the facts." The Consul studied us around with a quizzical air. "Well, the point is, I suppose, that I haven't given you the facts. . . . No, wait! The facts I've given are facts—all except the fellow's name, and I wouldn't tell you that for the mint—he's left a family behind. What I should have said was, *all* the facts."

And knocking out his pipe for the second time he told us the sequel to the tale.

It happened about a week after Diplo left for home. I was out for a stroll with Bird, my chief (I was glad afterward it wasn't Maynard that day), and we were just coming out of the old town through the *Bab Kebir* (and I was feeling kind of funny to see the place again in the light of day) when Bird called my attention to a wrinkled old henna-haired witch of a woman squatted under the nearest palm.

"Want to buy a monkey, Gore?" he asked me.

The dame had us in eye, straight off. She fingered us to come, grinning and jabbering and kicking her merchandise out into its best light at the end of its *halfa*-line tether. The merchandise was Happy Days.

I stopped. Who wouldn't? Bird took my arm.

"Good Lord, man, you don't want that thing. I was only joking."

"I know," said I. I told him I didn't want the ape, but that I did have a curiosity to know how the woman had come by it. Bird put it to her in dialect. It was like opening up a dam in spring. It seemed to me, waiting patiently, as if she were trying to tell the story of her life against the clock, waving her old bird claws, jerking the beast about, thumbing the jade-bead rings in its ears, scowling and grinning and making a devil of a fuss all told. When she'd begun to run down a little, Bird shifted to me with a grin of his own.

"You wanted to know about that monk. Well, that monk is a romantic and historic monk—a sort of a bread-cast-on-the-waters monk, you must understand. It seems that a good many years back—well, let's see; she calls it the 'starving year,' and that *was* a while ago—in the 'starving year.' it

seems, this same woman, sitting under this same tree here, disposed of this same creature for five gold *duoro* to a rolling *roumi* sailor man. She sold it, I gather, in a job lot, along with one painted flute, one stalk of Gafsa dates, and one male off-spring of her sister Aisha-bint-Bkhar—a three-year-old kid called Abdallah, with “yellow” hair. Now, it seems, very recently, the monk’s come back to find her. And now she’s waiting patiently for Abdallah to show up, too, eating the Gafsa dates, no doubt, and blowing resurrection on the painted flute. . . . How’s that for a romance, offhand? You wanted it, Gore. I should think you’d owe the old lady about one *sou*. Eh?”

I gave her the *sou* and we went along; and that’s the sequel to the tale.

It seemed as though the Tinsmith had the word.

“After all, I didn’t realize,” said he, “just how right I *was*. How about heredity now, Doctor?”

The Doctor didn’t answer. After a moment the Consul did.

“Heredity?” he mused. “Yes—yes——” He put up a finger and a thumb and opened them apart, like a man releasing a feather of thistledown in the wind. “Yes, heredity, about *so* much. About *so* long—out of a life. . . . This man I’ve called Diplo was torpedoed off the Galway coast on New Year, Seventeen, and went down praying God to save his king.”

"THE WRITER-UPWARD"

BY ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

From *Popular Magazine*

FURTHERMORE, Howaji," said Najib, appearing at the door of the tent and rousing Kirby from the perusal of a sheaf of month-old American newspapers, "furthermore, Howaji, it is a pleasurable thing to be thus bewritten upward. But——"

"What?" queried Logan Kirby, glancing at him in perplexity.

"To be written upward, of an assuredly," repeated Najib, adding, as Kirby's brain failed to grasp his meaning, "by this Melvin person, Howaji. You told me, yourself, he came himself hitherward from over than six thousand miles to bewrite us upward. He——"

"I told you Mr. Herbert Melvin came here to write us up," corrected Kirby. "Or rather to write up the Cabell Smelting Company's antimony mine here. That meant he wanted to look over the mine and ask us questions about its operation and output and all that sort of thing; and look over our books. Then he will write an article about it for the *Mine Journal* that sent him to Europe and the Near East to get a series of expert articles on a dozen or more mines, from the Hartz Mountains to Arawak—mines owned by American concerns and operating on this side of the Atlantic. That's what I meant when I said he had come here to 'write us up.' Mr. Melvin is——"

"Just as I speeched it, Howaji," said Najib. "I said it was a pleasurable thing to be bewritten upward. But this writer-upward person—this Melvin person——"

"When you speak of an American," chided Kirby with some sharpness, knowing the stark need of impressing upon

Oriental employees a reverence for the dominant race, "give him his title. Say 'Mister Melvin' or 'Melvin Howaji.' Not——"

"Excusingly, Howaji," protested Najib, stubbornly. "He does not merit it that I should be-mister him. He is not a Howaji. He is not a mister. He is a person. A hell-person, Howaji."

Angrily Kirby got to his feet. But Najib did not flinch. The fat little Syrian stood his ground stolidly.

"It is as I tell you," he insisted. "He is a hell-person. If he were not a guest and sacred by the guest law, it might be a mirthsome and wise deed to kill him."

Kirby checked his first impulse to break his riding switch over the shoulders of the presumptuous native for daring to speak thus of an American and a guest. Something in Najib's unwontedly tense earnestness made him pause.

Logan Kirby had lived long enough in the East to learn more about Oriental nature than it is granted to ninety-nine Occidentals in a hundred. Here, apparently, was something out of the common—something which might make inquiry wiser than chastisement.

Kirby had been born in Syria. And he had spent his boyhood in his father's big mission house at Nabous. Going to New York, he had taken the "mines course" at Columbia and had found a job with the Cabell Smelting Company on Broad Street.

A few years later the Cabells had sent him out as manager to their lucrative little antimony mine in the heart of the pink-brown mountains of Moab, three days' journey east of the Jordan. There his knowledge of Arabic and of Oriental human nature had made him invaluable to his employers in a thousand ways.

His mine superintendent and factotum and adoring satellite was Najib, a squat Damascene who once had misspent two blissful years with an all-nations show at Coney Island and who had acquired there a smattering of a language he mistook for English, of which he was so vastly proud that he would speak to Kirby in no other tongue, unless stress of overstrong emotion made him lapse into his native Arabic.

Kirby now stared in bewilderment at his superintendent. Najib, at news of Melvin's impending arrival at the Cabell

Mine, had been as happily excited as a child. For the two days of the guest's sojourn he had overwhelmed him with attentions. Hence Kirby's amazement at the sudden change of front.

Kirby himself had been as delighted as Najib when Melvin had written him from Brindisi of a projected stop at the Cabell Mine during a tour of American-owned properties. A laudatory article in so powerful an organ as the *Mine Journal* would do much for Logan's prestige and for that of the little mine in whose interests he was toiling so hard. At the very least such an article ought to mean a raise of salary to him; and it might even lead to his transfer to some less God-forsaken region.

Thus, he had granted to Melvin every facility for seeing the mine at its best; and he had offered the journalist the cream of such rough-and-ready hospitality as the mine afforded.

Now, during the guest's brief absence on a morning's ride among the nearer hills, Najib had come to him with this hint of unpleasantness.

"Speak up!" commanded Kirby. "Say whatever you've got to say. Forget, for once, that you're an Oriental, and come to the point. What are you driving at, when you speak that way of Mr. Melvin?"

"I bewent me to his tent, yonder, but just now, Howaji," serenely answered Najib. "He had left in his *unriding* trousers his bunch of keys. One of them befitted itself right sweetsomely into the key mouth of his trunk——"

"You mangy little pest!" raged Kirby. "Do you mean to say you went through a guest's luggage and——"

"Only to put it into an orderliness, Howaji, if need was. But need was not. It was neatful. And in it was his portfolio; full of words on many pages, in groups, and all printed forth in fair clearitude with a type machine. And the first one entitled itself, 'The Grunauer Mine: a Model Plant.' And the article bepraised that Grunauer Mine and its manager as if they were Es Semme and the Prophet—on whom be the peace of Allah and the ages of the ages! I do not know what the Grunauer Mine may be, Howaji. But of an assuredly it is a mine of much splendour and wealth, if all be true that this Melvin hell-person has bewritten himself upward about it. He——"

"Najib!" groaned Kirby.

Then he gave up the struggle to teach this Syrian a glimmering of a notion as to his own depravity in meddling with the locked papers of others. Najib, missing the look of utter disgust wherewith his chief favoured him, prattled on:

"There were other articles, too, Howaji; all begrouped by theirselves with a metal clasp. And some praised high the mines they spoke of and some praised low. But one was not praiseful at all. It was hell-ful. This one was not all finished. But it becalled itself, 'Cabell Antimony Mine—a Worthless Property; Wretchedly Managed.' It——"

"What!" gasped Kirby, amazement making him forget his contempt for the prying of his henchman.

"If I lie, may the Seventh Circle of Gehenna burn me to eternity!" said Najib.

He was groping with dirty hands into the folds of a dirtier *abieh* as he spoke. He fished out a sheaf of typed manuscript pages.

"Here it is, Howaji," said he, proffering the unfinished article to Kirby. "Beread yourself of it. It makes smaller of yourself and of the mine's management and of the output and of all, than the smallness of a flea. And it bespeaks itself merrily of *me*—of ME, Howaji—as a 'lazy monkey, fit companion for his boss.' Offspring of six thousand carrion crows and a trillion sick she-camels that he is, this Melvin person! May his remains find refuge in the stomachs of hogs and vultures! May his grave be dug up by pariah dogs! May his father's bones——"

Najib had dropped into fluent Arabic, so fiercely excited was he. Now, breaking off in his invective, he thrust the manuscript again toward Kirby.

"But read it for yourself, Howaji!" he begged.

"Take that thing back to Mr. Melvin's tent," ordered Kirby, without touching or so much as looking at the proffered papers, "and put it back where you found it."

"But, Howaji!" stammered the dumfounded Najib.

"*Tamám!*" rasped Kirby, jerking his thumb toward the guest's tent.

With a resigned sigh Najib pattered off to obey the mystifying command.

Left alone, Logan Kirby sat long and motionless, his un-

seeing eyes upon the pinkish peaks of the barren mountains that stretched away to the horizon beyond his tent door. His brain was in a jumble.

This man, Melvin, had come with proper credentials. He was a financial writer of some slight note. Kirby had often seen his name as author of articles and treatises in trade papers devoted to mining. The *Mine Journal* was not only the most powerful, but the most honourable periodical of its kind in America. Having been sent out to write this series of expert articles on the various American-owned mines across the Atlantic, why should Melvin have written such cruel and damaging lies about the Cabell Mine and about the manager-ship of the man who was his host and fellow countryman?

It did not make sense to Kirby from any angle. He was making the very best of the little mine, in every way. Such an article, appearing in a paper of the *Mine Journal's* prestige, would do much harm to the mine and would brand Kirby, throughout the profession, as an incompetent. It meant the end of his career. True, he and the Cabells might bring suit for libel. But libel, at a distance of more than six thousand miles, is a slow and costly and difficult thing to establish.

What could be the motive for so blackguardly and lying an attack?

As Kirby sat there, the jingle of bells and the droning song of an Arab sounded along the steep trail which wound upward toward the mine from westward. Up the trail rode a native muleteer—the man who brought the twice-a-week mail to Kirby from Jerusalem. Across his pillow-like saddle sprawled the mail sack. The muleteer was singing, in Beirut dialect, through his nose and in one minor tone:

"Seek to the depths of my heart, O beloved! And there thou shalt find naught but love for thee. Thine eyes are like to sunshine. Thine arms are——"

The inspired singer paused in this catalogue of his mythical sweetheart's physical geography long enough to scurry at his mule:

"Iellá, abras! Move, one-eyed child of Shaitán and a dead pig! Move, ere I rip the rotting flesh from thy useless bones! Iellá!"

This zeal for speed was due to his glimpse of Logan Kirby in the tent door. Kirby took from him the mail sack, unlocked

it, and shook out on the tent's deal table the pitiful handful of letters and papers and magazines. Pushing the papers to one side he seized avidly on the half-dozen letters—his sole personal link with the home land from which he was an exile.

The top letter bore the imprint of the Cabell Company's main office on Broad Street, New York City. This Kirby tore open first. And then for a space he forgot the others. For glancing down the typed page dictated by the company's vice-president, he read:

Herbert Melvin, the free-lance writer, is making a tour of Europe and the Near East, preparing a series of articles for the *Mine Journal*. But I do not think you will be troubled by him. He is likely to give Cabell Mine a wide berth. He is clever; and, though nothing can be actually proven against him, the people who know him best say he is twice as crooked as he is clever.

For example, he sent an emissary to several American owners of European and Occidental mines, telling them of his proposed trip and intimating—in a way that could not be brought home to him—that any private contributions toward his foreign travelling expenses, et cetera, would be repaid by a flattering write-up of the donor's mining interests out there; the larger the contribution, the more flattering the write-up.

I refused to see his emissary, who called here twice. Then Melvin himself took a chance and called. I saw him. He approached the topic of a bribe with infinite tact and said not one word I could hold him on. But he made his meaning so plain that I proceeded to tell him, very exhaustively, what I thought of him. Then I risked a suit for assault and battery by ejecting the miserable crook bodily from my office.

So I don't think you'll be troubled by a visit from him. He is likely to give the Cabell Mine the silence cure. Naturally, the *Mine Journal* will act in entire good faith in publishing his articles. Bates, the editor, is Melvin's cousin and is almost the only man alive who clings to a fond belief in Melvin's squareness. I hear, in a roundabout way, that Fosdick, of the Grunauer Mining Corporation, slipped the grafter a thousand dollars for the promise of a write-up that will send the mine's stock soaring. I don't know how true that is.

Kirby's reading was interrupted at this interesting point by the clatter of cantering hoofs on the trail. Herbert Melvin, spruce and smiling in natty riding clothes, swung down from his pony at the tent door, tossing the reins to Najib, who chanced to be inching toward the tent, and came swaggering blithely up to where Kirby sat.

“Great ride!” he exulted. “It's given me a wolf's appetite for lunch. Can we eat a bit early, old man? I've the rest of

my packing to do. I start for Jerusalem at three, you know."

"I know," said Kirby, heavily, adding, "Do you send any of your articles from Jerusalem, or do you wait till you get back to New York and turn them all in at once?"

"I'm finishing up the last one," answered Melvin, eager as ever to talk of his own exploits. "I've a half hour's work to do on it before I leave. Then I'm going to mail the whole lot from Jerusalem. The series begins in about three months. Yours was the last mine on the list. I'm going to loaf around Paris for a couple of months before I go home. So I'm glad to get the whole dozen articles off my hands and on their way before then. I—— Hello," he broke off, at sight of the papers and letters on the table. "Mail's in, eh? Nothing for me, I suppose?"

"Nothing for you," returned Kirby in that same heavy voice. "But one that is all about you. Here it is."

He handed Melvin the Cabell Company letter he had been reading. Melvin's alert eyes skimmed the pages. His expression did not change. When he had finished the perusal he calmly thrust the letter into his coat pocket.

"Unless I am much mistaken," he said, quietly, "that will form all the evidence I need for a five-figure libel suit against your company and its president. A writer, like myself, has no other asset as valuable as his literary honour. This letter assails my literary honour. And I——"

"And you hold that honour at five figures?" interposed Kirby. "Mr. Melvin, you are my guest—though an uninvited and undesired and dishonest guest. But here hospitality means more than at home. I don't wish to shame my hospitality by taking that letter from you by force. Kindly give it back to me."

He took a step forward as he spoke. Melvin's right hand went melodramatically to the butt of a pearl-handled revolver which hung ostentatiously at the belt of his motion-picture riding suit.

Through the open door, on noiseless bare feet, slipped a squat little figure. It paused for an instant behind the unsuspecting Melvin. Then it slipped out again, unobserved by the guest. In the doorway of the tent, on his way out, Najib paused only for the fraction of a second. He paused

to wink at Kirby, over Melvin's shoulder, and to hold up for momentary view the Cabell letter he had so deftly lifted from the loose-hanging outside pocket of the riding coat.

Then he was gone.

Kirby halted in his own advance toward the melodramatic visitor. Turning aside, he moved back to the table.

“H'm!” remarked Melvin, shoving back the weapon into its holster. “A gun is an excellent deterrent to forcible robbery.”

“Robbery of what?” asked Kirby, sulkily.

“Of the letter you wished to take from me,” retorted Melvin. “I hardly think you planned to take my watch, as well. The letter——”

“What letter?” asked Kirby, still sulkily; though he was at trouble to keep his mouth straight.

“The letter that is going to lose you your job and win me something more than fifteen thousand dollars in the courts,” said Melvin, dropping his hand into his pocket to emphasize his words.

Then he went silent and began to grope fidgetingly through the voluminous pocket—jettisoning from its depths a gold cigarette case and a silk handkerchief and other articles of vertu; but no letter. After which he dug into the other side pocket. Then angrily he ransacked his clothes, pocket after pocket, and glanced about the floor at his feet, on the chance that it might have fallen out.

“Maybe you left it in another coat,” suggested Kirby, unkindly. “Oh perhaps—more likely—you dreamed the whole thing. Yes, that must be it. You dreamed it. Now if only I could succeed in dreaming that you had been out here, disgracing America and the hospitality of a fellow-American, we'd both be content. Lunch will be ready in ten minutes. You won't mind eating alone? I expect to be too busy down at the mine to eat this noon. I'm afraid I'll even be too busy to come out of the shaft long enough to say good-bye when you go.”

He walked out of the tent and set off for the mine shaft, leaving Herbert Melvin gaping after him in furious bewilderment. On the way, Kirby met Najib. In silence, the little Syrian handed him the purloined letter.

“Thanks,” said Kirby.

"You are full of welcome, Howaji," replied Najib. "It was a pleasure. And, besides, I beliked its reading. I——"

"I'm going down the shaft," interrupted Kirby. "Let me know when Melvin Howaji and his groom have gone. I don't want to be disturbed till then."

But Najib did not let him know. Three o'clock arrived. Then four, and then five. Kirby sent one of the fellaheen to make inquiries and to bid Najib come to him.

The fellah returned with tidings that Melvin Howaji had departed shortly before three o'clock with his groom and baggage mule and said that Najib had received a message by the hand of some village boy, an hour later, and had also left camp.

Puzzled and vexed, Logan Kirby plodded up the hill to his own tent. There, pinned to the deal table, alongside his unread mail, he found a soiled slip of paper—the wrapper of one of his magazines—on which was scrawled in Arabic:

Kirby Howaji—on whom the blessings of the All-Compassionate:

Word has come to me of the death of my father's son and my half brother, Imbarak-Abou-Nasif, at Damascus. He has left me much wealth. Therefore, I go in all haste to set his house in order and to claim that which is my own before the effendina of the Serail can seal his effects. It may be that I shall be gone for a month. It may be that I shall be gone for a year. But I shall return. That I swear on the beard of my father. May he lie where rose leaves shall fall upon his tomb! I grieve to leave you without farewell. But there was need of haste and you bade me not to disturb you. When I am gone, think not harshly of me that I have left you nor doubt that I shall return. The way is long and there is ever peril from wandering Badawi in the mountain passes. And I am no warrior. So I am taking with me two of the fellaheen whom I can trust—for I have promised them much baksheesh. We shall all return to serve you. That I swear.

Logan Kirby swore loudly and fluently. It was bad enough to have his job and his future wrecked by Melvin without losing the services of his superintendent and two of the fellaheen for an indefinite time.

Luckily it was a slack season at the mine. But carrying the small force he did he could ill spare a single worker. Moreover, Najib was his one human companion in the loneliness of the long evenings when the jackals and wolves fought over carrion in the valleys below and the eerie

“laugh” of the hyena woke the hilltop echoes. Kirby was fond of the queer little native; he foresaw he should miss him acutely.

Shrugging his shoulders and calling to his aid such fatalistic Oriental philosophy as Syria had taught him, Kirby made ready to face the stretch of lonely shorthandedness. In the East one must either become philosophical or else one must be ready to face a nervous breakdown.

Yet the time dragged for the unhappy Kirby even more annoyingly than he had expected. He dreaded the inevitable day when word must come to him of the publishing of the article which would wreck his future and bring such cruel injury to the mine he loved. Eagerly he tore open every copy of the *Mine Journal* which the post brought. Eagerly he scanned every letter from the home office. He lost weight and he slept badly. This for three interminable months.

Then on a bright morning, at the end of the rainy season, three bedraggled men plodded up the trail toward his tent. They were dirty and ragged and thoroughly disreputable. Also, they were on foot, in this region where the taking of a long journey on foot betokens poverty. It required a second glance for Kirby to recognize the trio as Najib and the two missing fellaheen.

The fellaheen slunk off toward the mine huts down near the mouth of the shaft. Najib kept on toward the wondering Kirby. The little Syrian's dirty face was one vast smile. Before he was within ten feet of Logan he began to shout glad greetings.

“You miserable little renegade!” stormed Kirby, trying to be indignant. “I ought to discharge you! I ought to thrash you and then throw you out of camp. There's one comfort, though,” with an appraising glance at Najib's rags, “you don't seem to have profited much by the ‘much wealth’ your half brother left you. He——”

“No, Howaji,” meekly assented Najib, adding, “though for the sake of my family's honour it is but of a rightness that I should say if I had ever had a half brother, he would of an assuredly have been a most wealthy man. And I believe he would undoubtedly have bewilled it all to me. He——”

“It was a lie, then, about your half brother dying? You worthless——”

"All men must die, Howaji," said Najib, piously. "Even half brethren. Indeed, perchance, half brethren may die as easily as whole brethren, if it be the will of Allah. In His sight, all are of an equalness. If——"

"What crazy idiocy are you blithering?" snorted Kirby. "Where have you been? And——"

"This morning, Howaji," returned Najib, diving into his *abieh* in search of something, "this morning I have been past the Mejdal khan, where slept the post muleteer last night. He still beslept himself as we passed; he being a slumbersome person. So I beopened me the mail bag and brought the post. I—I counted the time and it besemed me it would be now. And I was aright. See?"

He handed Kirby two or three letters and then held up for his inspection an open copy of the *Mine Journal*.

Across the top of the page at which he had opened the magazine were blazoned the words:

AMERICAN-OWNED MINES IN EUROPE AND THE EAST

A Series

By Herbert D. Melvin

NO 1.—THE CABELL MINE: A Model Plant.

Brief Review of the Best-Managed and Best-Paying Concern, for Its Size, East of New York.

His eyes bulging, his brain aghast, Logan Kirby ran his eyes over the two thousand words of glowing praise that followed. The mine was described as a miracle of efficiency and of high-grade production. Kirby's exploits as manager were all but fulsome in their laudatory word-painting. He was held up as perhaps the only man in America who could have lifted so hopeless a venture from foredoomed failure to affluence.

Even Najib came in for a word of praise as a rarely competent superintendent and a born leader of men. The mine's output was exalted to the skies for both quality and quantity. Words were not spared to depict an institution for whose excellence the highest compliments were too feeble.

At the end of the article was the promise:

Next Month: The Grunauer Mine.

Dazed, Kirby raised his eyes from their incredulous scanning of the magazine. Najib, grinning blissfully, fidgeted in front of him. Kirby tried to speak. But he could only gulp. Najib, thrilling with the true Oriental love for story-telling and for dramatic effects, struck an attitude and began to declaim.

"Furthermore, Howaji," he said, "I enseech you to be-gladden yourself. We are not downward and outward, as we feared us we would be. We have much kudos and much raisements of salary in store for us. Wherefore, let us be rejoiceful and make merry. *Alla-hu-akbar! Mahmoud saidnah rasoul Allah! Ei——*"

"Najib!" gurgled Kirby, pointing shakily to the magazine in his hand. "What——"

"Be of a calmness, Howaji," begged Najib, dropping back into English. "Do not let my rejoicesomeness beget your goat. I will tell you. Hark yourself to my words of blessedness."

Then, patteringly at times and at times with dramatic halts and always with wealth of gestures, Najib launched forth upon his story.

"I befeared me that Melvin person might lose his way on the journey to Jerusalem," he began. "Wherefore I followed after. And with me I betook two ignoranceful fellaheen who are as my worshipping sons—because that I know of a murder which would emplace them in the prison for their life. Also because I bepledged that you would pay them a hundred mejidie each."

"I——"

"Of a patientness, Howaji, I plea you! We came upon Melvin Howaji and his groom at the guest hut at the foot of Nebo. It was late in the night. They beslept themselves with sweet snore soundings. The groom we wokened. And when we had talked softly to him for a space and when he saw our knives and when we beswore ourselves solemn what we would do if he tarried, he journeyed himself away from thither with much speed and no noisiness. Perchance he is journeying yet. For he went with much earnestness of feet.

"Then, while the Melvin person still made sweet snore sounds, we tied that poor Melvin person with ropes. And when he awokened we were carrying him from the trail. To

the shrine of the holy Fathma we carried him. He was of a willingness to be carried. Or, if not, he did not say he was not of a willingness. Though of a perhaps that may have been by reason that we had gagged him."

"Najib!"

"It was of a needfulness, Howaji. For my heart is of much softness and it sorrows me to hark the cries of distressedness. So I begagged the poor person. The Howaji remembers the shrine of the holy Fathma? Silly fellaheen think it is now the haunt of *afrits*. So they besteer them clear of it. And it is far off the path of others. It is a safesome place; and it is comfortful, too, except for the wet and the fat spiders and the fleas and such like and the darkness of the inside of it. And there that sad Melvin person has been beliving himself for four pleasant months. Until this morning. He——"

"No!" cried Kirby, in sharp repulsion.

"But yes, Howaji. He abided there for four months—that *we* might not abide jobless, perhapsly for life. A noble person, Howaji; and a fine sacrificer. For a day he did scant else but enhowl himself to a pitisome hoarseness. Then he grew hungered and most thirsting. And he listened with a little kindness when I bespoke him."

"When you?"

"When I enseeched him to take his little typing machine and becopsy two of his articles, Howaji, with some small changes to them. I made him becopsy that article about the Grunauer Mine and alterate its name to Cabell Mine and its output from aluminum to antimony and its place to the mountains of Moab and its manager and his superintendent to you and my lowly self. It was easy. For he had the Grunauer article to becopsy by."

"Do you actually mean you——"

"It was of a difficultness, Howaji. For three days we had to plea at him and keep him with no feeding and with but such water as he could belick from the wet walls of the shrine of the holy Fathma. And the spiders and the fleas were of an evilness that wrathed him. Oh, Howaji, I was so sorrowed for that poor unhappy person in his hungriness and his thirstings and his fleas that I wept tears. I wept tears whenever I looked upon his miserableness. So I forbearred to look.

"But on the fourth day he sent one of the fellaheen for me.

And he surrendered himself at me and did even as I had bidden him. Only, he sought to betrick me and do it wrong. So I unfed him for another hot day. And then he did it right. I read the first article writing and the second, side by their sides, and he had done it aright. Even as you behold it now. Then I encoaxened him to make the Grunauer article as he had at first made the Cabell one. And this he did with less crossfulness.”

“But why on earth——”

“If all the articles were of a like sweetness,” explained Najib, “ours would not beshine itself so gloryingly in the printed word as if the next one spoke evil of the other mine. So, when the two were done, I built me a fire and I burned the two articles and all his other ten articles in that fire, with much incantfulness. This I told him I did to belift a curse from our mine. But I did not burn them. I burned blank article-pages. Yet he enthought himself they were the ones he had becopied so fairly.

“In his portfolio were letters. One was to the sheik of the *Mine Journal*. It had been written the day he departed from here. And it was in a fine thick wrapping, with all the articles. It told the *Journal* sheik that here were all the articles and that he was beposting them from Jerusalem. In that packet I put the two altered articles and I benumbered them ‘one’ and ‘two’ and I emplaced them to the top of the others. Then, while the two fellaheen guarded him, I journeyed me to Jerusalem and to the post-serail there and I beposted the packet to the place addressed on its wrap. I had often beposted our mine mail for you; and I had wisdom of how it was done.”

“You blackguard!” groaned Kirby. “I don’t——”

“He had told that the articles would commence to be-publish theirselves in three months,” resumed Najib, unheeding. “I had not a pure trust in that Melvin person. Even though he had thought he beholded me burn them, he is a suspicionful person. I befeared me he would send a telegraph to the *Mine Journal* to watch for a trick. So I kept him as my honourful guest until the first article and the second article could beprint theirselves. Last night I set him at free-ness. And he——”

“You idiot!” roared Kirby. “It was rotten enough for

you to do such a vile thing as to kidnap him and hold him prisoner in that hole of a shrine and tamper with his mail! But don't you know what will happen now? The minute he gets to Jerusalem, he'll go to our consul and make formal complaint! Soldiers will be sent up here to arrest you—and perhaps take me along as an accomplice. The mine is likely to lose its concession and——”

“Tame yourself, Howaji!” cooed Najib. “Tame yourself and become ungoated. He will do none of those wicked and ungratesome and treacherous deeds.”

“But——”

“There were other letters in his locked portfolio, Howaji. And when the time hung with a heaviness I bеред me of them. One was to his brother and it enbragged itself of the money he had begotten for each of the praisings he gave to mines; and how he was going to unbusiness our mine because Cabell Effendi—may he be the sire of a hundred warrior sons!—had insulted him in New York in the serail of the company on the Street That Is Called Broad. And there was another letter to a woman who was not one of his wives. And in that lovesome letter he told how his wife would ‘raise hell’ if it were known about the woman he loved. Furthermore, Howaji, there was a letter to a man who had been darkposting him—no, ‘blackmail’ was the pretty word, whatever it may mean—and promising more money when he should be in Paris. And there were other letters. I——”

“Good Lord!”

“I have them here,” finished Najib. “I told him we should betreasure them in the case that he might do us ill. He will not.”

“Najib!” stammered Kirby, dizzily, after a long pause wherein the little Syrian wriggled bashfully and looked expectant. “You mangy crook! If you had one atom of understanding as to the damnableness of the thing you’ve done——”

“And how it has besaved us our darling job, Howaji,” supplemented Najib, “and won us kudos and baksheesh from the company’s sheik——”

“Oh, what’s the use!” sighed Kirby, giving up the fight and ashamed of himself for his own sensation of joyous relief. “What’s the use!”

“Of an assuredly, Howaji!” assented Najib. “What is the use? The use is larger than one man can say it. And it is a gladsome use that will mean wealth for us. As your wise feringhi proverb enspeeches itself: ‘When thieves fall out, honest men—honest men gather no moss.’ Or is it that they ‘make strange bedfellows’? *Bismillah!*”

TWILIGHT OF THE GOD

BY MARY HEATON VORSE

From *Harper's*

SANTOS didn't want to go home, and that was a fact. He told as much to his mate, Deutra, as he clambered over the side of his vessel, the *Maria Virginia*. He said:

"I don't want to go home to-night. I'm damned if I do!" And to emphasize it, he spat in the water which reflected the violent crimson of the sunset.

"Why not?" asked the mate, though he knew well enough the reluctance with which many men married a long time turn their footsteps toward home.

"I don't want to go home because my house hates me," said Santos.

"You mean you hate your house," said the mate.

He was a huge, red-faced man whose belly swung as he walked.

"No," said Santos, "I mean just what I say. I mean that my house hates *me*! It seems, when I go in, as gloomy as a woman who never wanted you to come and who wishes you'd go. My house hates me."

Santos was sitting high on the dory thwarts. His well-shod feet were placed daintily where the lustre of his shoes would be undimmed. In the evening light the faces of the men rowing him looked scarlet. They gazed at Santos with affectionate and respectful eyes, for he was an able captain and a great killer and they were in from a great catch.

"You should have stayed in Boston," said the mate, eying Santos through his little piggy eyes which were like shining slits in his fleshy jowls. "What you need is a bat. There isn't a man who doesn't get tired of his wife now and then!"

In this simple manner the mate interpreted Santos's discontent.

Santos said no more, for he wanted understanding. The reason Santos hated his house was that it was drenched with tears and it was empty.

Santos's wife, Julia, was a plain good woman. She was little and swart and her eyebrows nearly met in a sullen line. She had been childless for five years, and for this she had somehow managed to shift the blame to Santos in a skilful woman's fashion. Then she had had a child which had died as it was born.

At this Santos's mother commented:

"It's too bad, Manell, that you should be married to an awful plain, homely woman, but that you got a homely woman an' a barren woman, too, is worse than any man deserves!"

After the baby, Julia was harder to get on with than ever. The first few times Santos came home and found her crying over the useless baby clothes he had been moved and he had petted Julia and loved her; later her tears had made him angry, for he had felt the lack of children to the core of his heart. The desire for children clamoured loud in Santos to make up for his swarthy, nagging wife who kept such a jealous watch on him. He could feel her watching him all the time, every minute, when they went up town. When Julia was along he could take no pleasure in the admiring glances of the girls who looked at him, for she was jealous in a covert, underhand fashion.

To-night Santos felt sure he would find her snivelling over the baby clothes again. He had a wordless perception that she did this to rivet his attention on her. But she only greeted him in an accusing sort of way, and after supper he sat smoking on the veranda, figuring out all over again how he had come to marry Julia.

When he was a bachelor he roomed at her grandmother's with whom she lived. He never noticed Julia for a long time. Then he saw that when he passed her an ugly red would cover her face. Next he noticed how quick and trim she was about the house. Santos was keeping company at that time with Nellie Cabral, a wild, splendid-looking girl. He was even thinking it was time he got married. when he

caught Nellie kissing his handsome cook, Anthony Silva. His pride and his vanity were hurt, and when he next saw Nellie on the boardwalk he didn't speak to her. Santos missed Nellie. He missed her kisses and her pretty, cajoling ways, and for several days he was misanthropic.

One night he came home and as he went into his room he was conscious of someone there. Then he saw that it was Julia silhouetted against the window.

"Julia," he said, softly, "what is it? What do you want?"

"You——" she answered.

"W-what? . . ." He had a sudden feeling of intense surprise; a sort of gladness swept through him.

She stood there, little and humble and very lonely.

"I love you," she said into the silence. Her voice was very low, hardly above a whisper, and clear like the note of a bell.

He found himself shaking with excitement. There was something in her sheer audacity that roused him and pleased him as beauty never had.

"See here," he said, "see here. I—I don't love you."

"Oh, I know—I know—but I love you—I've always loved you."

It touched him inexpressibly. It soothed his vanity, too. He admired her blank courage. His heart pounded so it hurt him. She stood there waiting.

The air in the room seemed thick to Santos. Suddenly he seemed nearer to this plain little girl with her heavy lips than he had ever been to any one else.

Caution stood a moment beside him. But she had bared her heart and it left him helpless. Then suddenly she sank down on the edge of the bed. He could see her dim outline shaking with sobs.

She had vanquished him by her humble audacity and he had married her.

But always she knew he had never loved her, and for this and her childlessness she had never forgiven him. He was a handsome, gay man and the eyes of women followed him. She didn't forgive him for this, either.

He was thinking of all these things when Julia joined him on the veranda. After a time:

"I'm going out to walk," said Santos.

Julia answered nothing to this, and he sauntered down the brick walk. The streets were full of shadowy people; they seemed eager and happy to Santos, who felt remote and cut away from life. Two girls passed by, staring at Santos with the boldness of seaport girls. They were handsome, with cheeks like apricots, and well built. He wished he was in a strange town so he could talk and laugh with them; but even away from Julia he was still tied to her. Her sad, hostile presence was there beside him.

There was no escape.

He didn't know where he would go. He thought he might stop at the pool room or the movies. But then the music of a dance at the town hall struck his ears, and indifferent as a jelly fish in the tide, he wandered up the steps. Santos, drifting in on a slack tide of idleness, all his desires adrift, everything in him slack, ebb tide of the spirit, ran into Victoria Sonza.

He ran into her literally, caromed against her, drifting as he was on the stream of inertia and disgust. For a minute they stood staring at each other, at first in amazement and then in glad recognition, as though the mute, blind self who knows no obligations but the obligations of its desires had cried out: "Here is my mate."

Victoria was a tall woman, and when this happens among the Portuguese such a woman is of extreme magnificence. Victoria's eyes were deep and melancholy; her mouth, darker than a pomegranate flower, had the disconsolate droop of a woman made for love whose life is unfulfilled. Her face was a pale olive accented by her deep eyes and her dark crimson mouth. Her skin was drawn smoothly over her cheeks.

Someone introduced them. Santos, with his eyes on this woman who suddenly seemed more his own than any other human creature, could not remember afterward who it was who said their names. He held out his arms and she came to them, and as they danced they seemed to flow along like two streams joined. This woman danced close to him, enveloping him with her nearness.

"Are you a single woman?" he asked her, knowing well enough what the answer would be.

"No," she answered.

Though Santos had expected this, her words were a sharp knife in his side. Then Santos knew that he loved this woman, Victoria, though he didn't put it into words. She did not spur his fancy as did the little girls he met on the street. She was not escape from Julia, or entertainment, or passion. She was his woman. She was his mate without argument or question. He did not tell her these things; he only suffered because both of them were bound to someone else. Yet he was glad, too, with an overwhelming gladness, as though he had always before been a cripple and now, with this woman in his arms, he was whole. To spare himself from the silence of confession:

"Do you live here?" he asked. "I don't remember I saw you before."

"We've just come. My husband just opened a tailor shop."

"Where 'bouts do you live?"

"Next Manell Santos's house. You know, the big white one with green verandas all around."

"That's my house," said Manell. "You live next door to me. I am Manell Santos!"

They looked at each other, glad and terrified at once as people are when in the hands of fate. The music stopped.

"My husband's over there," she said. "Come and I'll make you acquainted."

She introduced Manell to a little stoop-shouldered man a half head shorter than herself. He was a drab little fellow, who looked at Victoria with submissive adoration.

She kept her husband in the conversation, praised him, brought him out as though defying any one to wonder why she had married him.

The Sonzas and the Santosos became friends. They would all four sit on the Santos's wide veranda and Julia and Anthony would talk about their gardens. Victoria and Manell didn't talk; they had no need to. There were nights when Manell wondered that Julia wasn't seized with jealous fury. He could feel love stream out of him toward Victoria, his woman, sitting there quiet, her eyes burning him. But Julia prattled on about cuttings and seedlings.

So things went on. But every time Santos came home from a cruise he would see Victoria waiting on a wharf. She

would make no sign, she would stand there waiting until Manell was over the side of the vessel. Then she would be home before he was, her hungry eyes watching for him. One thing they had. When Manell was home they went to the dance in the town hall, Anthony and Manell and Victoria, for Julia would not go. Then for a moment, as they danced, Santos would hold Victoria in his arms; for a moment they belonged to each other. They said everything and they said nothing.

Then one evening Victoria came to the house.

"Is Julia home?" she asked as Manell answered her knock.

"She's up street. Come in, won't you?"

Victoria hesitated as though trying to defy fate.

"Sit down and wait," Manell inserted, gently.

For a moment they were silent, and then Manell reached over for her hand.

"Victoria," he began—and before he could say any more Julia and Santos's mother came down the street absorbed in talk.

Julia was voluble as Santos had never seen her, and she was angry! She was telling a long story to old Mrs. Santos, indignation in her sharp gestures. The old woman shrugged with the fatalism of the aged. Victoria and Manell looked at each other. A thought leaped between them. It was: "*They are talking about us!*"

All that night Santos didn't sleep. All that night his mind buzzed like a fly in a spider's web. One thing stood out.

He loved Victoria and she loved him, and to-morrow they were going to the dance and the next day his vessel cleared.

So as usual the trio went to the town hall, and during the dance:

"Victoria," said Manell, "come outside to the wharf with me."

They walked out proudly, defying the eyes of the curious people thronging the doors. A strong tide bore them along. They walked to the end of the wharf, keeping a space between them, not speaking. A shed at the wharf's end threw an impenetrable angular shadow. Manell drew Victoria into its sheltering darkness and would have put his arms around her, but she lifted a warning hand.

"Santos," she said, "don't touch me."

"Oh, you're a good woman, are you?" said Santos. "For all the way you hold me when you dance and the way I can't come home from my vessel without finding your eyes burning me." For Santos when he was angry defied the world and didn't care for consequences.

"No," said Victoria, "I'm only proud. I want everything or nothing, Manell Santos! I'll run away with you, Santos, or you let me be!"

Santos felt like a gutted fish. He felt empty and as though he had no insides left. He felt as if he'd been drinking and couldn't find his feet. It frightened him to death to think of eloping and it burned him, too. Thoughts crowded his brain like mackerel in a net. He thought about his crew and what they'd say, and where people lived when they eloped, and about little swarthy Julia sitting snivelling over the baby clothes.

Stronger than all of this was Victoria's courage. He could think of nothing to say, so he put his arms around Victoria and kissed her. She struggled and fought with him and he kissed her to submission.

"When will you come?" he asked her, though he felt a good deal as though he were asking her when they should jump off Fish Wharf together.

"I'll go to-morrow," she said. "I'll go any time."

He sat in his room that night feeling winded. Then he began to figure what could be done. He sailed on the next day's tide, and Victoria could meet him in Boston. Afterward—he could think that out later. He started to go to Victoria. The boldness of her beckoned to him. He loved her because she had the bold design of leaving with him.

As he started for Victoria's he met Julia in the hall. She did not see him. She was going toward her room. She was so little and looked so defenseless that suddenly Santos knew he could not leave her. She had in life little enough; he could not leave her defenseless to pity.

He found Victoria waiting for him. She looked like a flower over which a blight has passed.

"Santos," she said, "I can't. I thought I could. Anthony—he's so little. He's got only me. I—I never loved him right."

"I know," said Santos, "I know."

They stood together united by their relinquishment. Then Santos left her. Santos went aboard his vessel with the peace of death in his heart.

In the summer of '19 a terrible storm smote all the New England coast. It came down on the fishermen without warning, and there were crews and there were vessels who never saw land again. Provincetown and Gloucester and New Bedford were full of lamentations of widows when the storm lifted. When the hurricane descended the *Maria Virginia* had just cleared George's Banks, full of fish and bound for Boston.

Santos looked in death's eye with indifference. It was as though his will to live had gone out of his body. He had been dashed back and forth in the grip of love and the renunciation of love, and he watched the storm without the tensing of will and muscle that danger usually brought to him. Slack and indifferent, he gave his orders. He welcomed the storm's death-bringing fury. Let it overwhelm him in the sea. He didn't care. Let it break the sinister monotony. Manell welcomed it. It made his heart lighter to think of death, for Santos knew life was no good to him any more since it could not hold Victoria.

At last the storm came crying in from the far reaches of the Atlantic. Something savage and glad sprang up in Santos to welcome it. An ache for death rushed over him. He wanted at any price to be free. He wanted never again to hear Julia's flat whine. He wanted never again to feel Julia's damp, clinging hands. He could have shouted in answer to the shriek of the wind.

The seething madness of the storm closed down upon him. The wind came streaming down like the black madness of murder. Sound incalculable filled the universe. The *Maria Virginia* shrieked under the blow like a living creature wounded to its death.

Then suddenly, more powerful than the impact of the storm, sprang up Santos's will to live.

A single thought, unified as light, had come on the wings of peril. It was:

"*I must have Victoria.*"

The vessel bent over to the gale and fled before it like a live

creature driven by fire. And then, with a terrible rending, her mainmast went and she almost with it, while her crew laboured to clear her of this wagging burden.

There were hours when Santos saw his vessel overwhelmed. There were hours when he saw himself and all his crew at the sea's bottom. And all the time there worked for Santos some unknown sense. The storm never conquered him. He was a puny human creature, but with some spark in him to match and conquer the blind, incomparable fury of the storm. He fought the storm for his love. He wrested his love from the fury of death. In after years the crew told him how Manell Santos rode death as if it were a horse.

The absolute necessity to live had gripped him—the supreme need of living that has dotted the pages of history with miracle and resurrection. Santos was born again and his new united soul could not know defeat.

Later, as the storm abated and, crippled but safe, he sailed into harbour, pity had been burned from him and old scruples. The thou-shalt-nots of church and town had been torn away in the storm. His mind was made up.

He stoop to run away? He would go to Julia and Anthony and tell them what was in his heart. For Santos intended to ride life as he had ridden out the hurricane. He had been saved to live. He had come to this necessity in the storm's unspeakable travail. This resolve had been welded in him by death itself.

He sailed into harbour as near a god as man ever becomes. His men looked at him with humble adoration. They had been dead men; he had given them life. More than that he had won back life for himself. He was reborn. He had left Julia behind as one leaves a dark dream. As though resurrected, he was coming to claim Victoria for his woman.

She was not there to meet him. No one met Santos. Other men's wives were there, but not Victoria, not Julia.

The women looked at him with veiled pity in their eyes. No one came too near Santos. It seemed as if a vacuum had been made around him. A feeling of discomfort grew on him and with discomfort came anger. His own men were staring at him.

What had happened? His men who had looked at him with

the adoring eyes of those who have been snatched from the hand of death now drew back from him.

Santos was used to admiration and respect so he walked up the street in growing anger, in deepening amazement. Acquaintances ducked past him in embarrassed haste, in their eyes this puzzling, veiled pity—pity for Santos who had been stronger than death.

He hurried along, his eyes searching hungrily for Victoria. She was nowhere, Julia was nowhere. He had returned braced for combat. He had expected to ride over the flood of Julia's reproaches as over the fury of the storm. And now there was nothing over which to ride. He felt winded as a man who jumps from a height—who feels the ground rise up to meet him.

He stormed up the steps of his home. The door was locked.

He shook the door and cried out into the silence:

"Julia," and again, "Julia," but as he cried, his eyes searched Victoria's home. It turned blank, empty windows on him as stony as his own locked front door.

Dread plucked at Santos's heart. Slowly he went to his side door. It opened to his hand. The house had an air of emptiness. There was none of the cheerful litter of a lived-in abode. It was as neat as a room where death had been. He walked through the house and as he did a slow, stealthy fear travelled up Santos's back, a certainty formed itself in the back of his mind.

Downstairs a door opened and light footsteps sounded through the house. He turned and faced Victoria.

"Oh, Manell," she faltered, "Manell." All her anxiety, all her love was in the caress of his name. For her he was resurrected from the dead. "We thought—you—wouldn't get back."

She was here in his house, speaking to him in the voice of love. He drew back from her as though to ward off her love in the presence of the wronged dead.

"Where's Julia?"

"Why, haven't you heard?"

"Dead?" cried Manell.

"Dead!" Victoria exclaimed, "no, gone, run off *with Anthony Sonza!* Who would have thought? Gone together and left us this letter—telling how they couldn't stand your

ways—your ways—my ways—any more. And the town laughing and holding its sides. Gone like rats—cleared out!”

She looked at him with the eyes of love. Then, her arms dropped, the happiness in her eyes changed to blankness. “I thought you’d be glad,” she faltered.

“*Glad!*” he said; “glad to have everyone laughing at me! Glad to have my wife run off with a runt . . .” he raved, while in Victoria amazement strove with anger. She had come to offer her love. Secure in the delight of her mate, with joyful news of all difficulties solved, and he raved: “Gone with that rat. *My wife. My wife* cleared out. Oh, a weasel will mate with a weasel! Blind! blind! And I—and I—looking at them talking over the fence. I never dreamed. I thought *they* were *jealous!* Time and time again I’ve seen them and never dreamed. . . .”

Victoria drew herself apart, watching his fury. Then suddenly she collapsed. Mirth rocked her, the malicious laughter of all time shook her peal on peal. Her laughter rang through Julia’s empty house.

Santos had landed from his vessel a god, master of fate, stronger than death. He was going to claim his woman arrogantly. Like a god he was prepared to trample under foot the small moralities. Now, behold he was the butt of the centuries, the most ridiculous creature on earth, a betrayed husband. Betrayed by his creature Julia, while his woman, Victoria, laughed.

VOLUME II
BOOK TWO

PRELUDE

By EDGAR VALENTINE SMITH

From *Harper's*

WHEN she was fifteen years old Selina Jo was doing a man's work in Pruitt's turpentine orchard; properly, though, her story begins earlier than this.

It was shortly before his daughter was born that Shug Hudsill brought his young wife, Marthy, to a sandy land homestead—twenty-five miles from the nearest railroad—in that section of the country which borders the Gulf of Mexico. There followed shortly the inevitable log-rolling, at which the neighbours—mostly Hudsills themselves—contributed their labour. Shug furnished refreshments in the form of “shinny,” an unpalatable, but unusually potent, native rum. Otherwise, his part in the erection of his future home was largely advisory. Despite this, though, the house, a two-room cabin of the “saddle-bag” type, was soon erected. Hand-split pine boards covered the roof and gave fair promise of keeping out the rain. An unglazed window and a door in each room, which would be closed with rough wooden shutters during inclement weather, served for ventilation and lighting. A stick-and-clay chimney at one end of the cabin gave outlet to the single fireplace which was to answer the dual purpose of cooking and heating.

By devious methods Shug accumulated two or three runty, tick-infested cows and a few razorback hogs. These were left, in the main, to shift for themselves. There were tough native grasses available and the canebrakes in Shoalwater River were close by. During severe weather such of the cows as chanced to be giving a few pints of thin, watery milk daily were fed a little home-grown fodder and corn on the ear. With proboscides inordinately sharpened for the purpose, the hogs probed for succulent roots in the rank undergrowth

of the nearby swamp. When hog-killing season arrived Shug would shoulder his gun and slouch away for his winter's supply of meat. Neighbours charged it against him that he was not always careful to see to it that they were his own shotes which he killed. Since it was a simple matter, though, to snip off the telltale ear markings of a dead pig, his pilferings, if a fact, were never proved.

Corn sprouted slowly in the thin soil; it grew up dispiritedly and came to maturity stunted as to blade, stalk, and ear. Sweet potatoes yielded generously in new ground; each year a fresh plot was cleared, broken, and planted to these. A patch of sugar cane was always grown for molasses; a portion of this, it was generally conceded, was finally made into "shinny," since Shug was known to be an adept at its manufacture. Certain it is that he made frequent extended trips away from home with his wagon and yoke of oxen, never troubling to explain the reason for his absence.

It was amid these surroundings, sufficient in themselves, one would have said, to hinder physical, mental, and moral growth, that the girl Selina Jo was born. The occasion was in no sense of the word an event with Shug and Marthy. Since all married people of their acquaintance had children, the baby simply represented, to them, the inevitable. With the birth of the child, though, Marthy became barren.

For the first eighteen months of her existence the baby crawled about the cabin unnamed. Then it occurred to Marthy that their offspring ought to be christened.

"Shug," she suggested casually, "seems to me we ort to be namin' that air young 'un."

Shug, lolling in the shade of a water oak, shifted his quic and spat disinterestedly. "I ain't objectin' none," he replied.

"How 'bout callin' her 'S'liny Jo'?" Marthy asked.

"Fittin' enough name fer her, I reckon," Shug yawned.

As the child grew up she came to accept her parents as they had long since accepted her—merely as a bald fact. There was never the slightest evidence of parental affection upon the one side or of filial attachment upon the other.

Once Marthy came upon Shug whipping the girl with a switch.

"What you whippin' her fer?" she asked. Her tone was one of simple curiosity, nothing else.

"All young 'uns needs it," Shug replied virtuously, as he tossed the switch aside. "Hadn't been my daddy usetah whale me powerful, I wouldn't a been nigh the man I am now; not nigh."

It was a matter for remark between the parents that, even at a tender age, Selina Jo rarely emitted any outcry under punishment. There burned in her sloe-black eyes, though, the flame of an emotion which she checked upon the surface.

One would have expected the girl to respond to the influence of heredity. Her parents, the cattle, the hogs, even the crops about her were stunted, half-starved in appearance. By contrast, Selina Jo, upon a daily ration made up almost exclusively of corn pone, molasses, and home-cured pork as salt as ocean brine, defied all known dietary laws, and flourished amazingly. She was precocious, too. When she was only seven years old she could swear just as well—rather, just as wickedly—as could Shug himself. She learned early, though, that, as a source of information, her parents were practically *nil*. Thenceforth, the questions that had rushed to her lips were succeeded by a look of eternal interrogation in her sombre eyes.

It was shortly after her twelfth birthday that a young school-teacher—the only one the community ever knew—came into the Hudsill settlement. Selina Jo was grudgingly allowed to attend the school. For six months the young man's enthusiasm held out. Then it waned and died. Few of the older people could either read or write, and the opinion among them seemed to be universal that what was good enough for them was good enough for their offspring. But before the school closed Selina Jo had learned the alphabet and a portion of the old-fashioned first reader.

She missed the school, and she always kept, close at hand, her thumbled and dog-eared book, the only one that she possessed. The school-teacher had lighted the fires of ambition within her. She came to be troubled by the realization that her mental development was lagging behind her physical growth.

"S'liny Jo," she informed herself one day in a fit of musing, "you air as p'izen strong as a gallon o' green shinny, but you

don't know skercely nothin'." A moment later she added dejectedly: "Ner ain't got no chanchet o' learnin', neether; not nary par-tick-le of a chancet!"

Shoalwater River afforded her chief means of diversion. She never remembered when or how she learned to swim. Every day that the weather permitted she enjoyed a plunge in the river. Soon she noticed that no less pleasant than the contact of the water with her naked body was the comfortable after-feeling of cleanliness. Following this, came a feeling of repugnance toward her shiftless and slovenly parents.

She had long since begun to assist with the crops. With the manure scraped from the cow lot she made the beds for the potatoes. At planting time she pulled the slips and set them out. She hoed the sugar cane and thinned the corn. During harvest she did almost as much work as Shug and Marthy combined.

Before she was fourteen she had broken a pair of young steers to the yoke. She split the rails and laid the fence for a new potato patch. Using for the purpose the young oxen which she had broken, she prepared the ground for planting. She was as tall as her father now, a slender, wiry creature, her symmetrical young body as free from blemish as the trunk of a healthy pine tree.

A vague unrest troubled her at times, though. Something occurred one day which intensified this. In a corner of the cabin she found a dust-covered photograph. Brushing it off, she gazed upon a face that was unfamiliar. She took the picture to Marthy.

"Maw," she asked, "who is this?"

"Her mother glanced at it indifferently. "Me," she answered listlessly.

"*You?*" Selina Jo gasped.

"Yeah. Ruther, it usetah be. Tuck when I married yore paw."

Selina Jo scanned the comely pictured face for some likeness to the slatternly creature who had given her birth. Wild resentment against something—she scarcely knew what—flamed in her heart. Suddenly she dashed the photograph to the floor and hurried from the cabin. As one reads the chronicle of her words, it must be remembered that her vocabulary was patterned after that of her father.

"Oh, Goddlemighty!" she burst out tempestuously, "I don't want to be like her! I ain't goin' to, neither!"

Her acquaintances were limited to the score of families, most of them relatives, and all of them mental and moral replicas of her own, who lived near by. There was an almost abandoned church in the neighbourhood where, at rare intervals, some itinerant preacher held services. Upon one occasion, though, Shug took the family to preaching in what was known as the Briggs settlement which was ten miles nearer the railroad. It was here that Selina Jo had it impressed upon her young mind just how people of her stripe were looked upon by those cast in another mould.

Shortly after they had seated themselves in the church, Shug, uncouth and unshaven on the men's side, and she and her mother on that reserved for her sex, Selina Jo heard one of the women whisper to her neighbour:

"Some o' that Hudsill tribe!"

As the girl caught the slur in the words her face flushed darkly. She began to notice the unfavourable looks with which the men of the congregation were regarding her father. Even the children stared superciliously toward her mother and herself. Puzzled, vaguely hurt, at first she wondered why.

Lingering just outside the church at the close of services, she waited, shyly hopeful that some one would speak to her. No one paid her the slightest heed. In a land where a lack of hospitality was the one unpardonable sin, this alone was enough to convince her that something was terribly wrong somewhere. But she held her peace until they had completed the tedious homeward journey.

"Maw," she demanded abruptly, as soon as they were alone, "how come we ain't like other folks?"

"What air you talkin' about?" Marthy intoned querulously.

"Them folks in that air Briggs settlement."

"Wa'l?"

"They looked slanchwise at Paw when we went in an' set down." Selina Jo waited a moment, her face clouding at the thought. "An' them li'l' old gals looked slanchwise at me, too. Durn 'em!"

"How kin I he'p the way they looked at us?" Marthy

whined. "Treatin' us thatta way just 'cause we air pore."

"'T weren't that, neither," the girl insisted stubbornly. "Them men—most of 'em—was wearin' overalls. The school-teacher said rich folks don't wear them kind o' clo'es to meetin'."

"Tryin' to git better 'n yore raisin', air you?" Marthy suddenly showed unwonted spirit. "Wa'l, gal, you kin just make up yore mind to be like yore pore maw an'——"

"I ain't goin' to be like you!" The words shot out with sudden passion. "I ain't!"

"God ha' mercy!" Marthy's usually expressionless face showed a trace of surprise at this outburst. "But I've allus said seein' lots o' things gits notions inta young 'uns' heads what ain't good fer 'em."

"Ner that ain't all I seed, neither," Selina Jo retorted. "They didn't none o' them folks—not nary one o' 'em—ast us home to eat a Sunday dinner with 'em."

At the conclusion of the church service she had seen invitations to the noonday meal being extended and accepted right and left by the Briggs settlement householders. Since it was the custom to include the veriest stranger in these, the fact that none had been offered her people left room for only one conclusion: the Hudsills were looked upon by their neighbours as being unworthy to receive one. Slowly the impression fastened itself upon her brain that her family was hopelessly low in the social scale—"poison low-down," she would have phrased it. This conviction gripped her. It stung—and it stayed with her.

Fortunately, something occurred about this time to divert her thoughts temporarily. Three miles from Shug's home, Pruitt Brothers, turpentine operators, established a woods commissary. Selina Jo's first visit to the store left her gasping with pleasure. Filled with the usual gaudy assortment carried in stock by the general country store, to the half-starved eyes and soul of the woods-bred girl, the place was a wonderland. Dress goods in loud patterns dazzled her sight; vari-colored ribbons flaunted themselves tantalizingly before her gaze. But the one thing that charmed her, that held her spellbound, was a cheap, ready-made gingham dress. She made frequent unnecessary trips to the store merely to

feast her eyes upon it. She would look from it to the faded homespun that she wore and sigh enviously. Once she even mustered the courage to ask the price. It was an insignificant sum, but the thought struck her with sickening force that it might just as well have been a thousand dollars. She had never owned a piece of money.

Slowly, as her yearning for the dress became almost unbearable, a plan formed in her mind. Coming in from her tasks one day, she found Shug, just returned from one of his mysterious periodical trips.

"Paw," she began timidly, "I—I got a hankerin'."

"S'pose you have?" Shug's manner was more surly than usual. "A hankerin' never hurt nobody, yet."

"But, but I shore 'nough want sump'm."

"Wantin' an' gotten' is diffe'ent things. What is it?"

"They's the purtiest dress over to Pruitt's store," Selina Jo began eagerly, "an' it's made outen real gingham."

"Gingham?" Shug whirled about with a snarl. "What air you talkin' about, gal?"

Selina Jo's heart sank. "I ain't never had nary one," she offered placatingly. "An'——"

"Ner ain't never li'ble to, neether. Homespun's good enough fer yore pore maw an' it'll hatter be good enough fer you. I ain't goin' to be workin' myse'f to skin an' bone to be fittin' out no young 'un in fancy riggin's."

"But, Paw, it don't cost much."

"It costes just that much more 'n you're goin' to git. Shet up!"

It was then that Selina Jo unfolded her plan. "I'm goin' to git me that air dress," she announced dispassionately. "I'm aimin' to pay fer it myse'f, too."

"How?"

"Yearnin' the money at public work."

"You?" Shug snorted derisively. "Whare'll you git any public work?"

"In Pruitt's turkentime orchard. They's a heap o' the work I kin do. I could do scrapin' er dippin'; reckon I could even do hackin'."

Shug had slumped into the one comfortable chair in the room. Turning his head, he glared at his daughter.

"You air not goin' to work in no turkentime orchard," he

rasped. "You air goin' to stay right here an' he'p yore pore maw an' me. I told you oncet to shet up!"

It struck Selina Jo suddenly that life was, somehow, terribly one-sided and unfair. Other girls in the community, who didn't work as hard as she did, were beginning to wear gingham dresses for Sunday. She thought bitterly that in return for her slaving she had received bed and board—nothing more. By everything that was right, she reasoned, she had earned at least one store-bought dress. Yet it was roughly denied her. Some of the thoughts which had been haunting her for months struggled for expression. Her soul cried out against what was a patent injustice. But she managed to speak calmly.

"Fer as I kin figger it out, Paw," she said, "I been doin' my sheer o' keepin' this here fambly up. I broke them last yoke o' steers, an' one of 'em you was afeared to tech. I've split rails an' laid fences; I've broke new ground. An' the fu'st time I ast fer anything you say I cain't have it."

She ceased speaking for a moment, but her steady gaze never left Shug's face.

"Now, I'm goin' to work fer Pruitt," she continued slowly, "till I git me the money I need."

Something must have occurred during Shug's recent trip—probably a hurried flight from officers—to increase his normal perverseness. He had risen from his chair. Taking a heavy leather strap from the wall, he started toward Selina Jo.

"You air, huh?" Advancing, he fondled the strap suggestively. "You'll git a larrupin', that's what!"

With the first evidence of her father's intention, Selina Jo's face had flushed a brick-red. Now it paled suddenly. She had not even been threatened with corporal punishment for years. Wild rebellion surged within her. A carving knife lay upon the rude deal table beside which she was standing. One slim, brown hand dropped down beside the knife. Her emotion visible only in the tumultuous heaving of her breast and the white, set expression of her face, she waited, motionless, her dark, sombre eyes gazing unwaveringly into Shug's face.

"Paw," she said evenly, "just you tech me oncet with that

strop an', as shore as God gives me stren'th, I'll cut yore heart out."

An innate coward, Shug recognized a danger sign when he saw it. The hand which held the strap dropped to his side. He backed slowly away.

"You . . . you . . ." he sputtered and stopped.

"You an' Maw been sayin'," Selina Jo continued, "that I'm tryin' to be better 'n my raisin.' But I ain't forgot how them Briggs settlement folks looked at us slanchwise. 'Tweren't 'cause we was p'izen pore, neither. They knowed, somehow, we was plumb low-down an' ornery. That's why they didn't none of 'em ast us to a Sunday dinner. They seed we was trash. Course I'm honin' to be better 'n that kind o' raisin'—an' I'm goin' to, too!"

Shug had retreated to the doorway, where he stood watching this new daughter of his with furtive, fearful eyes. The meanest of petty tyrants, when he held the whip hand, doubtless he expected that Selina Jo would exhibit the same trait. There was nothing of the bully in the girl, though. Threatened with what she considered to be undeserved punishment, she had simply acted upon the dictates of her immature mind and had seized upon the only means at hand to escape it.

It was several moments before Shug mustered courage to speak. "Sence you air goin' to do public work," he whined presently, "'t ain't nothin' but right you ort to pay fer yore bed an' board."

Selina Jo was glad to agree to this arrangement. When informed of it later, Marthy sullenly acquiesced. She would have to do the housework now, which was no more to her liking than the realization that Shug would permanently pocket the money for their daughter's board.

It was the next day that Selina Jo sought out Lige Tuttle, woods foreman for Pruitt Brothers.

"I'm lookin' fer a job," she announced bluntly.

"Sorry," Tuttle answered brusquely, "but all our cooks are niggers."

"Cook?" was the scornful answer. "I ain't astin' to be no cook. I want shore 'nough work."

Tuttle smiled patronizingly. "What can you do?"

"Scrapin', dippin', er hackin'," was the confident answer.

"You?" Tuttle laughed softly. "Why, that's a man's work. It's hard."

"Any harder 'n breakin' bull yearlin's to the yoke? Er splittin' rails an' breakin' new ground?"

"Mean to say you've done all that?"

"I most bardaceously have!"

Labour was scarce at the time. Tuttle considered the girl's request carefully, asked a few more questions, and decided to take a chance.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"S'liny Jo."

"What else?"

It was the first time Selina Jo had ever been asked her surname; she felt the blood rush to her face.

"What's your last name?" Tuttle repeated.

The answer came almost inaudibly: "Hudsill."

"Shug Hudsill's young 'un?"

"How kin I he'p it?" the girl burst out passionately. "If you'd a been borned a Hudsill, you'd hatter be one, too!"

"Don't get mad, child." There was something in the spirit of this strange creature that Tuttle could not understand; but he respected it. "I wasn't aimin' to low-rate you none just because of your daddy. Come here to-morrow mornin', an' I'll try you out."

Selina Jo found that the work *was* hard. The dry, slippery pine needles underfoot made walking itself a task. She carried a heavy bucket into which she dipped the raw gum, emptying the bucket, when filled, into barrels scattered about the orchard. From sun-up till sunset, and later, she toiled; not once, though, did she grumble. She was too foolishly happy. What she was undergoing was the prelude to real existence, as she saw it. What better, she asked herself, could any strong, healthy girl desire than a steady job dipping turpentine for which she was paid real money?

Occasional passersby, strangers to the vicinity, amazed at seeing a girl engaged in such unusual work, would pause to ask friendly questions. The first flush of pleasure that this gave Selina Jo was quickly erased by the bitter after-tang of reflection: these people were kind because they did not know she was a Hudsill.

While with practice she developed skill, it was three

months before she had saved the money she needed. The gingham dress had been laid aside for her. But her ambition had soared. A beautiful dress above a pair of bare legs and feet would never do. Then, too, since her only item of headgear was the sunbonnet which she wore every day, she would need, besides shoes and stockings, a hat.

The day came at last, though, when she could make her purchases. With her arms filled with bundles, she started out joyously on her three-mile walk home.

A half mile from the commissary she paused indecisively at a crossroads. The right-hand road, leading to Shoalwater River, meant the lengthening of her journey a full mile; but the river, with its promise of a cooling plunge, enticed her. As she stood hesitant, trying to decide, she observed a stranger approaching on horseback. She drew aside to let him pass, but he reined in his horse and hailed her.

"Evenin', little sister! Live hereabouts?"

"Down the left-hand fork a piece." Selina Jo bent her steady glance upon the stranger. "Who air you?"

"I'm Holmes—sheriff of the county."

Instinctively the girl drew back. "What air you wantin' o' me? I ain't done nothin'."

"Lord bless you, little sister," the sheriff laughed, "I'm not after you. Thought maybe as you live round here you might tell me something I want to know."

It seemed that a murder had recently been committed in the bay-shore country ten miles distant. Circumstances pointed to the guilt of two men who had been arrested. Assuming that the murderers had passed through the Hudsill section en route to or from the scene of the crime, the sheriff was seeking evidence to prove this.

Strangers were enough of a rarity in the neighbourhood to be remembered easily. Selina Jo recalled two men who had passed that way whose description fitted those charged with the murder.

Sheriff Holmes was elated. "Would you like a trip to Eastview?" he asked.

"Eastview?" Selina Jo's heart skipped a beat. "That's town, ain't it—whare the railroad trains is at?"

"Yes. We'll want you there a week from to-day." The sheriff filled in a blank subpoena and extended it to the

girl. "Look me up in the courthouse soon as you get to town."

Selina Jo's breathless announcement that she was going to court created a flurry at home until Shug learned why she had been summoned. Then he breathed easily.

It was decided that she could use the oxen and wagon for the trip, as Eastview was twenty-five miles distant. This method of travel, being slow, would necessitate an early start on the day before the trial. When that day dawned, though, one of the oxen was found to be indisposed. Selina Jo assembled a lunch of corn pone and side meat, filled a small bottle with molasses, and, dressed in her new finery, set out on foot.

Within an hour the new shoes began to pinch. She took them off, tied them together by their strings and slung them over her shoulder. The stockings were rolled into balls and stuffed into her pockets.

Late in the afternoon she bathed her feet and legs in a brook just outside Eastview and donned shoes and stockings again.

It was dusk when she arrived at the sheriff's office. An overflow crowd at the single hotel necessitated her staying with Sheriff Holmes's family that night.

With the inborn timidity of the woods-bred girl, she remained there until summoned to court in the late forenoon of the following day. By the time her evidence was concluded, though, she had partially overcome her shyness, and was ready for sightseeing.

Wandering about the interior of the courthouse, she marvelled at the white plaster walls. Then she watched several people using the sanitary drinking fountain. Presently she found courage to try it herself. The technic she found to be rather difficult, but after she had mastered it she became a frequent patron.

Later, she ventured outside the courthouse.

Sheriff Holmes found her during the noon recess. She had commandeered a small goods box which she was using as a seat. Her enraptured gaze was fastened upon a scene across the street. Three large, two-story frame buildings, painted a dazzling white, stood upon a lot which occupied an entire block. Beneath the branches of huge water oaks, were scores of girls, dressed in white blouses and dark-blue skirts.

Sheriff Holmes smiled understandingly. "Like it?"

Selina Jo did not even turn her head. "Whose is them air li'l gals?" she asked breathlessly.

"The state's—for the present," was the answer.

"Who?"

"The state. That's the reformatory for girls."

It was plain that the remark conveyed no information to Selina Jo. "Do which?" she asked.

"When girls—young ones, like you—break the law," the sheriff explained, "they bring them here to be reformed."

"What's re-formed?"

"Well . . . it's like this: before they let a girl go again, she has to prove that she's been changed for the better."

"Changed?" Selina Jo looked up with a quick indrawn breath. "They make 'em diffe'rent f'um what they was?"

"Ye-e-es . . . that's about it, I guess."

"Do they learn 'em outen books in there?"

"Oh, yes; they have regular hours for study."

"An' could—could a gal git in there what didn't know nothin' but a part o' the fu'st reader?"

"You don't understand, yet, child. It's only for girls who do wrong. Now, a girl like you never would go there."

Selina Jo sighed dejectedly. Her eyes caressed the buildings with their spotless white walls and wide-flung shutters, and the groups of girls scattered about the lawn.

Presently she pointed to a high iron picket fence which enclosed the lot. "What's the fence fer?" she asked.

"Why, if that fence wasn't there, little sister, half the girls there would light out before midnight," the sheriff answered.

"They'd run away?" Selina Jo shook her head incredulously. "F'um them purty houses?"

Since it would be impossible for her to reach home that day, she spent another night with the sheriff's family. In her dreams she saw white-painted buildings fashioned of real lumber. There was real glass in the windows, too; they weren't just yawning black holes in the walls. And the chimneys were of brick; so different from the flimsy stick-and-clay affair that leaned drunkenly against one end of the cabin at home. Home! She seemed to sicken at the thought.

Her dreams were peopled with girls in white blouses and blue skirts, thousands of them, it seemed to her. They were all within an iron-fenced inclosure, beckoning to her to enter; and she was always just on the outside.

With morning came thoughts of her work in the turpentine orchard. Inexplicably, a vague dissatisfaction awoke within her. The idea began to burn itself into her consciousness that, though she might spend a lifetime in honest toil there, she would always be referred to as "one of that Hudsill tribe." Apparently there was no escape from that.

During breakfast she was unusually quiet and thoughtful. With a shy acknowledgment of thanks, she accepted the liberal lunch provided by the sheriff's wife and made her adieus. Two miles outside the town she left the highway. A hundred yards from the road she seated herself upon a log and grimly prepared to wait.

Darkness had fallen when she again entered Eastview and cautiously approached the reformatory from the rear. She scaled the iron fence with comparative ease. Crouching low, she crept toward a lighted window on the ground floor. Two girls of about her own age sat at a study table. Standing before the window, Selina Jo spoke.

"Kin I come in?" she asked softly.

One of the girls screamed slightly; the other, after her first involuntary start of amazement, seemed wonderfully self-possessed.

"Sure, Rube!" she invited cordially. "Step right in!"

Selina Jo climbed over the low window sill into the room.

"What you doin' here?" one of the girls asked.

"I'm j'inin' o' this here re-formin' place," was the unruffled answer.

"You're *wha-a-at*?"

Very simply Selina Jo made known her intentions.

"But you'll be caught, sure as shootin'," one of the girls objected. "In the first place you've got no uniform."

Naturally, Selina Jo expected to be discovered sooner or later; but she had prepared for this eventuality—as she thought.

"Maybe we can fix that," the other girl broke in eagerly. "There's that old blouse of mine and your extra skirt. Gee! I wish we could put it over! Wouldn't old Iron Jaw be wild?"

Between them they rigged a uniform for Selina Jo. At the nightly inspection she crept under the bed. Later, she slept on a pallet.

The fortunate indisposition of a girl across the hall solved the breakfast problem. Selina Jo, taking the vacant place in the formation, passed undiscovered for the moment.

Among the many contingencies which she could not have provided against, though, were the sharp eyes and keen memory for faces possessed by Mary Shane, the matron in charge. As the girls were forming for certain duties shortly after breakfast, Selina Jo felt a heavy hand upon her shoulder. She looked up into the stern face of the matron.

"What are you doing here?" was the curt inquiry.

"Me?" Selina Jo's attempt at surprise was ludicrous. "I—I b'long here, ma'am."

"You do? You ought to know me then. What is my name?"

Instinct told the girl that this must be the matron. "Old Iron Jaw," she answered unabashed.

Mary Shane smiled grimly. "Come with me," she ordered.

She led the way, Selina Jo following meekly, to her little cubby-hole of an office.

"Now, then," the matron commanded sternly, "tell me the truth. How did you get in here?"

"I—I clumb that fence."

"Why?"

"Just 'cause, ma'am, I nacherly got to git re-formed," was the perfectly serious answer. "I ralely b'long here. I'm so p'izen mean they ain't no other place fitten fer me."

"What's your name?"

Now it came, not hesitantly, but proudly—even defiantly: "S'liny Jo Hudsill!"

Mary Shane knitted her brows thoughtfully: "Hudsill?"

"Yes'm. Them low-down, sneakin', ornery Shoalwater River Hudsills, ma'am. Ever'body in the country knows 'bout 'em. They air the shif'lesses' fambly that ever was borned. An' what's furdernore, I'm the hellraisin'es' one o' the intire gin'ration!"

"What are you trying to tell me, child?"

"Just how tarnation mean I am, ma'am."

In her plans for forcibly entering the reformatory, Selina Jo had hit upon the idea of charging herself, when her presence should be discovered, with an assortment of crimes sufficient to insure her incarceration for an indefinite period. It seemed to her now that the moment for her confession had arrived.

"Last mont', ma'am," she continued earnestly. "I burned down three cow stalls. Right attar that I went into my own blood uncle's cornfiel' an' pulled up ever' smidgin's bit o' his young corn—pulled it smack up by the roots, ma'am. Ner that ain't all, not nigh all. I almost hate to tell you this'n, ma'am. But last week I stobbed a li'l nigger baby to death. Killed him dead. Dead as——"

"Hush, child, hush!" the matron ordered. "You did none of those things. Now then: Tell me—the truth!"

It came then—the truth—a story haltingly told of a child's scarcely understood heartache for self-betterment. Selina Jo didn't want to stay in the reformatory long, she said; only long enough to learn all there was in the books. Then she would be willing to leave. She would change her name and go away off somewhere. Maybe the folks there, not knowing that she was a Hudsill, would invite her to a Sunday dinner when she went to meeting.

People, some of them, rather, said of Mary Shane that her long association with the so-called criminally inclined young had rendered her immune to every human emotion. But as the recital progressed, the matron turned her back suddenly and strode over to a window.

Presently the story was finished.

"An' please, ma'am," a voice was asking hopefully, "I kin stay now, cain't I?"

Mary Shane did not reply, for a moment. "I'm afraid not, child," she said presently. Few who thought they knew her would have recognized the matron's voice. "You—you've done nothing to be kept here for. You'll have to go home."

Then it was that Selina Jo's heart broke. She flung herself upon the matron.

"Oh, God, ma'am," she sobbed, "please don't make me go back! I *ain't* goin' back! I don't want to be one o' them low-down Hudsills all o' my endurin' days. I want to be somebody, like other folks is. I don't want to have a passel

o' dang li'l' old gals lookin' at me slanchwise when I go to meetin'. You don't know what it is, ma'am, to have a hankerin'. I want to be changed! I want to be made diffe'ent! Ma'am, I just *got* to git re-formed!"

Mary Shane had opened her mouth to speak, to check this outburst; suddenly her iron jaws closed with a snap.

"Come with me, child," she said. "We'll see the superintendent." A moment later she added: "Jim Wellborn generally runs this reformatory to suit himself, anyway!"

The matron was the one person connected with the institution who took whatever liberties she chose. When she wished to be particularly impressive, she addressed people by their full names.

"Jim Wellborn," she said brusquely, as she and Selina Jo entered the superintendent's office, "this girl wants to tell you something. You listen closely."

Wellborn, big and broad-shouldered, had glanced up as they entered. His quizzical glance had rested first upon the girl; now he looked at Mary Shane.

"When you've heard her story," the matron continued, "if you can't find some way to keep her here so she can learn to live the life that Almighty God has shown her that she's fitted for, why I'll undertake the job of looking after her myself and the reformatory can get another matron."

"Hm-m-m!" Superintendent Wellborn's gray eyes twinkled; but he did not smile outright. "Well . . . the reformatory is fairly well satisfied with its present matron. Good-day, Mary Shane! Sit down, little girl."

The matron closed the door and returned to her office. For nearly an hour she sat, idle, at her desk. It was the first of the month; there were statements to be prepared, reports to be rendered, bills to be checked. But it was patent that her mind was upon none of these things. From time to time she glanced up impatiently at some noise in the hallway. Presently there came the sound of hurrying footsteps. She whirled her chair about.

Selina Jo stood in the doorway. Questions, answers, were unnecessary. The flush in her cheeks, the flame in her sloe-black eyes, blazoned her happiness to the world. As she realized what the superintendent's decision had been, an answering light gleamed, momentarily, in Mary Shane's face.

Characteristically, though, it was quenched upon the instant, as she slipped once more, automatically, into her habitual mask of granite.

But even a granite mask—since it is only a mask—cannot stifle a heart song; at best, it can only muffle it. For as she went about the prosaic business of acquainting Selina Jo with her duties, Mary Shane was well aware that, somewhere, deep within herself, a small voice was chanting, chanting over and over:

“For this one—just this one, Lord—who comes of her own accord to be changed, for this single one who wants to be made different, I thank Thee!”

A FRIEND OF NAPOLEON

By RICHARD CONNELL

From Saturday Evening Post

ALL Paris held no happier man than Papa Chibou. He loved his work—that was why. Other men might say—did say, in fact—that for no amount of money would they take his job; no, not for ten thousand francs for a single night. It would turn their hair white and give them permanent goose flesh, they averred. On such men Papa Chibou smiled with pity. What stomach had such zestless ones for adventure? What did they know of romance? Every night of his life Papa Chibou walked with adventure and held the hand of romance.

Every night he conversed intimately with Napoleon; with Marat and his fellow revolutionists; with Carpentier and Cæsar; with Victor Hugo and Lloyd George; with Foch and with Bigarre, the Apache murderer whose unfortunate penchant for making ladies into curry led him to the guillotine; with Louis XVI and with Madame Lablanche, who poisoned eleven husbands and was working to make it an even dozen when the police deterred her; with Marie Antoinette and with sundry early Christian martyrs who lived in sweet resignation in electric-lighted catacombs under the sidewalk of the Boulevard des Capucines in the very heart of Paris. They were all his friends and he had a word and a joke for each of them, as on his nightly rounds he washed their faces and dusted out their ears, for Papa Chibou was night watchman at the Musée Pratoicy—"The World in Wax. Admission, one franc. Children and soldiers, half price. Nervous ladies enter the Chamber of Horrors at their own risk. One is prayed not to touch the wax figures or to permit dogs to circulate in the establishment."

He had been at the Musée Pratoicy so long that he

looked like a wax figure himself. Visitors not infrequently mistook him for one and poked him with inquisitive fingers or canes. He did not undeceive them; he did not budge. Spartanlike he stood stiff under the pokes; he was rather proud of being taken for a citizen of the world of wax, which was, indeed, a much more real world to him than the world of flesh and blood. He had cheeks like the small red wax pippins used in table decorations, round eyes, slightly poppy, and smooth white hair, like a wig. He was a diminutive man and, with his horseshoe moustache of surprising luxuriance, looked like a gnome going to a fancy-dress ball as a small walrus. Children who saw him flitting about the dim passages that led to the catacombs were sure he was a brownie.

His title "Papa" was a purely honorary one, given him because he had worked some twenty-five years at the museum. He was unwed, and slept at the museum in a niche of a room just off the Roman arena where papier-mâché lions and tigers breakfasted on assorted martyrs. At night, as he dusted off the lions and tigers, he rebuked them sternly for their lack of delicacy.

"Ah," he would say, cuffing the ear of the largest lion, which was earnestly trying to devour a grandfather and an infant simultaneously, "sort of a pig that you are! I am ashamed of you, eater of babies. You will go to hell for this, Monsieur Lion, you may depend upon it. Monsieur Satan will poach you like an egg, I promise you. Ah, you bad one, you species of a camel, you Apache, you profiteer——"

Then Papa Chibou would bend over and very tenderly address the elderly martyr who was lying beneath the lion's paws and exhibiting signs of distress and, say, "Patience, my brave one. It does not take long to be eaten, and then, consider: The good Lord will take you up to heaven, and there, if you wish, you yourself can eat a lion every day. You are a man of holiness, Phillibert. You will be Saint Phillibert, beyond doubt, and then won't you laugh at lions!"

Phillibert was the name Papa Chibou had given to the venerable martyr; he had bestowed names on all of them. Having consoled Phillibert, he would softly dust the fat wax infant whom the lion was in the act of bolting.

"Courage, my poor little Jacob," Papa Chibou would say. "It is not every baby that can be eaten by a lion; and in such a good cause too. Don't cry, little Jacob. And remember: When you get inside Monsieur Lion, kick and kick and kick! That will give him a great sickness of the stomach. Won't that be fun, little Jacob?"

So he went about his work, chatting with them all, for he was fond of them all, even of Bigarre the Apache and the other grisly inmates of the Chamber of Horrors. He did chide the criminals for their regrettable proclivities in the past and warn them that he would tolerate no such conduct in his museum. It was not his museum of course. Its owner was Monsieur Pratoucy, a long-necked, melancholy marabou of a man who sat at the ticket window and took in the francs. But, though the legal title to the place might be vested in Monsieur Pratoucy, at night Papa Chibou was the undisputed monarch of his little wax kingdom. When the last patron had left and the doors were closed Papa Chibou began to pay calls on his subjects; across the silent halls he called greetings to them:

"Ah, Bigarre, you old rascal, how goes the world? And you, Madame Marie Antoinette; did you enjoy a good day? Good evening, Monsieur Cæsar; aren't you chilly in that costume of yours? Ah, Monsieur Charlemagne, I trust your health continues to be of the best."

His closest friend of them all was Napoleon. The others he liked; to Napoleon he was devoted. It was a friendship cemented by the years, for Napoleon had been in the museum as long as Papa Chibou. Other figures might come and go at the behest of a fickle public, but Napoleon held his place, albeit he had been relegated to a dim corner.

He was not much of a Napoleon. He was smaller even than the original Napoleon, and one of his ears had come in contact with a steam radiator and as a result it was gnarled into a lump the size of a hickory nut; it was a perfect example of that phenomenon of the prize ring, the cauliflower ear. He was supposed to be at St. Helena and he stood on a papier-mâché rock, gazing out wistfully over a nonexistent sea. One hand was thrust into the bosom of his long-tailed coat, the other hung at his side. Skin-tight breeches, once white but white no longer, fitted snugly

over his plump bump of waxen abdomen. A Napoleonic hat, frayed by years of conscientious brushing by Papa Chibou, was perched above a pensive waxen brow.

Papa Chibou had been attracted to Napoleon from the first. There was something so forlorn about him. Papa Chibou had been forlorn, too, in his first days at the museum. He had come from Bouloire, in the south of France, to seek his fortune as a grower of asparagus in Paris. He was a simple man of scant schooling and he had fancied that there were asparagus beds along the Paris boulevards. There were none. So necessity and chance brought him to the Museum Pratoucy to earn his bread and wine, and romance and his friendship for Napoleon kept him there.

The first day Papa Chibou worked at the museum Monsieur Pratoucy took him round to tell him about the figures.

"This," said the proprietor, "is Toulon, the strangler. This is Mademoiselle Merle, who shot the Russian duke. This is Charlotte Corday, who stabbed Marat in the bathtub; that gory gentleman is Marat." Then they had come to Napoleon. Monsieur Pratoucy was passing him by.

"And who is this sad-looking gentleman?" asked Papa Chibou.

"Name of a name! Do you not know?"

"But no, monsieur."

"But that is Napoleon himself."

That night, his first in the museum, Papa Chibou went round and said to Napoleon, "Monsieur, I do not know with what crimes you are charged, but I, for one, refuse to think you are guilty of them."

So began their friendship. Thereafter he dusted Napoleon with especial care and made him his confidant. One night in his twenty-fifth year at the museum Papa Chibou said to Napoleon, "You observed those two lovers who were in here to-night, did you not, my good Napoleon? They thought it was too dark in this corner for us to see, didn't they? But we saw him take her hand and whisper to her. Did she blush? You were near enough to see. She is pretty, isn't she, with her bright dark eyes? She is not a French girl; she is an American; one can tell that by the way she doesn't roll her *r*'s. The young man, he is French; and a fine young fellow he is, or I'm no judge. He is so

slender and erect, and he has courage, for he wears the war cross; you noticed that, didn't you? He is very much in love, that is sure. This is not the first time I have seen them. They have met here before, and they are wise, for is this not a spot most romantic for the meetings of lovers?"

Papa Chibou flicked a speck of dust from Napoleon's good ear.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "it must be a thing most delicious to be young and in love! Were you ever in love, Napoleon? No? Ah, what a pity! I know, for I, too, have had no luck in love. Ladies prefer the big, strong men, don't they? Well, we must help these two young people, Napoleon. We must see that they have the joy we missed. So do not let them know you are watching them if they come here to-morrow night. I will pretend I do not see."

Each night after the museum had closed, Papa Chibou gossiped with Napoleon about the progress of the love affair between the American girl with the bright dark eyes and the slender, erect young Frenchman.

"All is not going well," Papa Chibou reported one night, shaking his head. "There are obstacles to their happiness. He has little money, for he is just beginning his career. I heard him tell her so to-night. And she has an aunt who has other plans for her. What a pity if fate should part them! But you know how unfair fate can be, don't you, Napoleon? If only we had some money we might be able to help him, but I, myself, have no money, and I suppose you, too, were poor, since you look so sad. But attend; to-morrow is a day most important for them. He has asked her if she will marry him, and she has said that she will tell him to-morrow night at nine in this very place. I heard them arrange it all. If she does not come it will mean no. I think we shall see two very happy ones here to-morrow night, eh, Napoleon?"

The next night, when the last patron had gone and Papa Chibou had locked the outer door, he came to Napoleon, and tears were in his eyes.

"You saw, my friend?" broke out Papa Chibou. "You observed? You saw his face and how pale it grew? You saw his eyes and how they held a thousand agonies? He waited until I had to tell him three times that the museum

was closing. I felt like an executioner, I assure you; and he looked up at me as only a man condemned can look. He went out with heavy feet; he was no longer erect. For she did not come, Napoleon; that girl with the bright dark eyes did not come. Our little comedy of love has become a tragedy, monsieur. She has refused him, that poor, that unhappy young man.

On the following night at closing time Papa Chibou came hurrying to Napoleon; he was a-quiver with excitement.

"She was here!" he cried. "Did you see her? She was here and she kept watching and watching; but, of course, he did not come. I could tell from his stricken face last night that he had no hope. At last I dared to speak to her. I said to her, 'Mademoiselle, a thousand pardons for the very great liberty I am taking, but it is my duty to tell you—he was here last night and he waited till closing time. He was all of a paleness, mademoiselle, and he chewed his fingers in his despair. He loves you, mademoiselle; a cow could see that. He is devoted to you; and he is a fine young fellow, you can take an old man's word for it. Do not break his heart, mademoiselle.' She grasped my sleeve. 'You know him, then?' she asked. 'You know where I can find him?' 'Alas, no,' I said. 'I have only seen him here with you.' 'Poor boy!' she kept saying. 'Poor boy! Oh, what shall I do? I am in dire trouble. I love him, monsieur.' 'But you did not come,' I said. 'I could not,' she replied, and she was weeping. 'I live with an aunt; a rich tiger she is, monsieur, and she wants me to marry a count, a fat leering fellow who smells of attar of roses and garlic. My aunt locked me in my room. And now I have lost the one I love, for he will think I have refused him, and he is so proud he will never ask me again.' 'But surely you could let him know?' I suggested. 'But I do not know where he lives,' she said. 'And in a few days my aunt is taking me off to Rome, where the count is, and oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear——' And she wept on my shoulder. Napoleon, that poor little American girl with the bright dark eyes."

Papa Chibou began to brush the Napoleonic hat.

"I tried to comfort her," he said. "I told her that the young man would surely find her, that he would come back and haunt the spot where they had been happy, but I was

telling her what I did not believe. 'He may come to-night,' I said, 'or to-morrow.' She waited until it was time to close the museum. You saw her face as she left; did it not touch you in the heart?"

Papa Chibou was downcast when he approached Napoleon the next night.

"She waited again till closing time," he said, "but he did not come. It made me suffer to see her as the hours went by and her hope ebbed away. At last she had to leave, and at the door she said to me, 'If you see him here again, please give him this.' She handed me this card, Napoleon. See, it says, 'I am at the Villa Rosina, Rome. I love you. Nina.' Ah, the poor, poor young man. We must keep a sharp watch for him, you and I."

Papa Chibou and Napoleon did watch at the Musée Pratoucy night after night. One, two, three, four, five nights they watched for him. A week, a month, more months passed, and he did not come. There came instead one day news of so terrible a nature that it left Papa Chibou ill and trembling. The Musée Pratoucy was going to have to close its doors.

"It is no use," said Monsieur Pratoucy, when he dealt this blow to Papa Chibou. "I cannot go on. Already I owe much, and my creditors are clamouring. People will no longer pay a franc to see a few old dummies when they can see an army of red Indians, Arabs, brigands and dukes in the moving pictures. Monday the Musée Pratoucy closes its doors for ever."

"But, Monsieur Pratoucy," exclaimed Papa Chibou, aghast, "what about the people here? What will become of Marie Antoinette, and the martyrs, and Napoleon?"

"Oh," said the proprietor, "I'll be able to realize a little on them, perhaps. On Tuesday they will be sold at auction. Someone may buy them to melt up."

"To melt up, monsieur?" Papa Chibou faltered.

"But certainly. What else are they good for?"

"But surely monsieur will want to keep them; a few of them anyhow?"

"Keep them? Aunt of the devil, but that is a droll idea! Why should any one want to keep shabby old wax dummies?"

"I thought," murmured Papa Chibou, "that you might keep just one—Napoleon, for example—as a remembrance——"

"Uncle of Satan, but you have odd notions! To keep a souvenir of one's bankruptcy!"

Papa Chibou went away to his little hole in the wall. He sat on his cot and fingered his moustache for an hour; the news had left him dizzy, had made a cold vacuum under his belt buckle. From under his cot, at last, he took a wooden box, unlocked three separate locks, and extracted a sock. From the sock he took his fortune, his hoard of big copper ten-centime pieces, tips he had saved for years. He counted them over five times most carefully; but no matter how he counted them he could not make the total come to more than two hundred and twenty-one francs.

That night he did not tell Napoleon the news. He did not tell any of them. Indeed he acted even more cheerful than usual as he went from one figure to another. He complimented Madame Lablanche, the lady of the poisoned spouses, on how well she was looking. He even had a kindly word to say to the lion that was eating the two martyrs.

"After all, Monsieur Lion," he said, "I suppose it is as proper for you to eat martyrs as it is for me to eat bananas. Probably bananas do not enjoy being eaten any more than martyrs do. In the past I have said harsh things to you, Monsieur Lion; I am sorry I said them, now. After all, it is hardly your fault that you eat people. You were born with an appetite for martyrs, just as I was born poor." And he gently tweaked the lion's papier-mâché ear.

When he came to Napoleon, Papa Chibou brushed him with unusual care and thoroughness. With a moistened cloth he polished the imperial nose, and he took pains to be gentle with the cauliflower ear. He told Napoleon the latest joke he had heard at the cabmen's café where he ate his breakfast of onion soup, and, as the joke was mildly improper, nudged Napoleon in the ribs, and winked at him.

"We are men of the world, eh, old friend?" said Papa Chibou. "We are philosophers, is that not so?" Then he added, "We take what life sends us, and sometimes it sends hardnasses."

He wanted to talk more with Napoleon, but somehow he couldn't; abruptly, in the midst of a joke, Papa Chibou broke off and hurried down into the depths of the Chamber of Horrors and stood there for a very long time staring at an unfortunate native of Siam being trodden on by an elephant.

It was not until the morning of the auction sale that Papa Chibou told Napoleon. Then, while the crowd was gathering, he slipped up to Napoleon in his corner and laid his hand on Napoleon's arm.

"One of the hardnenses of life has come to us, old friend," he said. "They are going to try to take you away. But, courage! Papa Chibou does not desert his friends. Listen!" And Papa Chibou patted his pocket, which gave forth a jingling sound.

The bidding began. Close to the auctioneer's desk stood a man, a wizened, rodent-eyed man with a diamond ring and dirty fingers. Papa Chibou's heart went down like an express elevator when he saw him, for he knew that the rodent-eyed man was Mogen, the junk king of Paris. The auctioneer in a voice slightly encumbered by adenoids, began to sell the various items in a hurried, perfunctory manner.

"Item 3 is Julius Cæsar, toga and sandals thrown in. How much am I offered? One hundred and fifty francs? Dirt cheap for a Roman emperor, that is. Who'll make it two hundred? Thank you, Monsieur Mogen. The noblest Roman of them all is going at two hundred francs. Are you all through at two hundred? Going, going, gone! Julius Cæsar is sold to Monsieur Mogen."

Papa Chibou patted Cæsar's back sympathetically.

"You are worth more, my good Julius," he said in a whisper. "Good-bye."

He was encouraged. If a comparatively new Cæsar brought only two hundred, surely an old Napoleon would bring no more.

The sale progressed rapidly. Monsieur Mogen bought the entire Chamber of Horrors. He bought Marie Antoinette, and the martyrs and lions. Papa Chibou, standing near Napoleon, withstood the strain of waiting by chewing his moustache.

The sale was very nearly over and Monsieur Mogen had bought every item, when, with a yawn, the auctioneer droned:

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, we come to Item 573, a collection of odds and ends, mostly damaged goods, to be sold in one lot. The lot includes one stuffed owl that seems to have moulted a bit; one Spanish shawl, torn; the head of an Apache who has been guillotined, body missing; a small wax camel, no humps; and an old wax figure of Napoleon, with one ear damaged. What am I offered for the lot?"

Papa Chibou's heart stood still. He laid a reassuring hand on Napoleon's shoulder.

"The fool," he whispered in Napoleon's good ear, "to put you in the same class as a camel, no humps, and an owl. But never mind. It is lucky for us, perhaps."

"How much for this assortment?" asked the auctioneer.

"One hundred francs," said Mogen, the junk king.

"One hundred and fifty," said Papa Chibou, trying to be calm. He had never spent so vast a sum all at once in his life.

Mogen fingered the material in Napoleon's coat.

"Two hundred," said the junk king.

"Are you all through at two hundred?" queried the auctioneer.

"Two hundred and twenty-one," called Papa Chibou. His voice was a husky squeak.

Mogen from his rodent eyes glared at Papa Chibou with annoyance and contempt. He raised his dirtiest finger—the one with the diamond ring on it—toward the auctioneer.

"Monsieur Mogen bids two hundred and twenty-five," droned the auctioneer. "Do I hear two hundred and fifty?"

Papa Chibou hated the world. The auctioneer cast a look in his direction.

"Two hundred and twenty-five is bid," he repeated. "Are you all through at two hundred and twenty-five? Going, going—sold to Monsieur Mogen for two hundred and twenty-five francs."

Stunned, Papa Chibou heard Mogen say casually, "I'll send round my carts for this stuff in the morning."

This stuff!

Dully and with an aching breast Papa Chibou went to his room down by the Roman arena. He packed his few clothes into a box. Last of all he slowly took from his cap the brass badge he had worn for so many years; it bore the words "Chief

Watchman." He had been proud of that title, even if it was slightly inaccurate; he had been not only the chief but the only watchman. Now he was nothing. It was hours before he summoned up the energy to take his box round to the room he had rented high up under the roof of a tenement in a near-by alley. He knew he should start to look for another job at once, but he could not force himself to do so that day. Instead, he stole back to the deserted museum and sat down on a bench by the side of Napoleon. Silently he sat there all night; but he did not sleep; he was thinking, and the thought that kept pecking at his brain was to him a shocking one. At last, as day began to edge its pale way through the dusty windows of the museum, Papa Chibou stood up with the air of a man who has been through a mental struggle and has made up his mind.

"Napoleon," he said, "we have been friends for a quarter of a century and now we are to be separated because a stranger had four francs more than I had. That may be lawful, my old friend, but it is not justice. You and I, we are not going to be parted."

Paris was not yet awake when Papa Chibou stole with infinite caution into the narrow street beside the museum. Along this street toward the tenement where he had taken a room crept Papa Chibou. Sometimes he had to pause for breath, for in his arms he was carrying Napoleon.

Two policemen came to arrest Papa Chibou that very afternoon. Mogen had missed Napoleon, and he was a shrewd man. There was not the slightest doubt of Papa Chibou's guilt. There stood Napoleon in the corner of his room, gazing pensively out over the housetops. The police bundled the overwhelmed and confused Papa Chibou into the police patrol, and with him, as damning evidence, Napoleon.

In his cell in the city prison Papa Chibou sat with his spirit caved in. To him jails and judges and justice were terrible and mysterious affairs. He wondered if he would be guillotined; perhaps not, since his long life had been one of blameless conduct; but the least he could expect, he reasoned, was a long sentence to hard labour on Devil's Island, and guillotining had certain advantages over that. Perhaps it would be better to be guillotined, he told himself, now that Napoleon was sure to be melted up.

The keeper who brought him his meal of stew was a pessimist of jocular tendencies.

"A pretty pickle," said the keeper; "and at your age too. You must be a very wicked old man to go about stealing dummies. What will be safe now? One may expect to find the Eiffel Tower missing any morning. Dummy stealing! What a career! We have had a man in here who stole a trolley car, and one who made off with the anchor of a steamship, and even one who pilfered a hippopotamus from a zoo, but never one who stole a dummy—and an old one-eared dummy, at that! It is an affair extraordinary!"

"And what did they do to the gentleman who stole the hippopotamus?" inquired Papa Chibou tremulously.

The keeper scratched his head to indicate thought.

"I think," he said, "that they boiled him alive. Either that or they transported him for life to Morocco; I don't recall exactly."

Papa Chibou's brow grew damp.

"It was a trial most comical, I can assure you," went on the keeper. "The judges were Messieurs Bertouf, Goblin, and Perouse—very amusing fellows, all three of them. They had fun with the prisoner; how I laughed. Judge Bertouf said, in sentencing him, 'We must be severe with you, pilferer of hippopotamuses. We must make of you an example. This business of hippopotamus pilfering is getting all too common in Paris.' They are witty fellows, those judges."

Papa Chibou grew a shade paler.

"The Terrible Trio?" he asked.

"The Terrible Trio," replied the keeper cheerfully.

"Will they be my judges?" asked Papa Chibou.

"Most assuredly," promised the keeper, and strolled away humming happily and rattling his big keys.

Papa Chibou knew then that there was no hope for him. Even into the Musée Pratoucy the reputation of those three judges had penetrated, and it was a sinister reputation indeed. They were three ancient, grim men who had fairly earned their title, The Terrible Trio, by the severity of their sentences; evildoers blanched at their names, and this was a matter of pride to them.

Shortly the keeper came back; he was grinning.

"You have the devil's own luck, old-timer," he said to

Papa Chibou. "First you have to be tried by The Terrible Trio, and then you get assigned to you as lawyer none other than Monsieur Georges Dufayel."

"And this Monsieur Dufayel, is he then not a good lawyer?" questioned Papa Chibou miserably.

The keeper snickered.

"He has not won a case for months," he answered, as if it were the most amusing thing imaginable. "It is really better than a circus to hear him muddling up his clients' affairs in court. His mind is not on the case at all. Heaven knows where it is. When he rises to plead before the judges he has no fire, no passion. He mumbles and stutters. It is a saying about the courts that one is as good as convicted who has the ill luck to draw Monsieur Georges Dufayel as his advocate. Still, if one is too poor to pay for a lawyer, one must take what he can get. That's philosophy, eh, old-timer?"

Papa Chibou groaned.

"Oh, wait till to-morrow," said the keeper gayly. "Then you'll have a real reason to groan."

"But surely I can see this Monsieur Dufayel."

"Oh, what's the use? You stole the dummy, didn't you? It will be there in court to appear against you. How entertaining! Witness for the prosecution: Monsieur Napoleon. You are plainly as guilty as Cain, old-timer, and the judges will boil your cabbage for you very quickly and neatly, I can promise you that. Well, see you to-morrow. Sleep well."

Papa Chibou did not sleep well. He did not sleep at all, in fact, and when they marched him into the inclosure where sat the other nondescript offenders against the law he was shaken and utterly wretched. He was overawed by the great court room and the thick atmosphere of seriousness that hung over it.

He did pluck up enough courage to ask a guard. "Where is my lawyer, Monsieur Dufayel?"

"Oh, he's late, as usual," replied the guard. And then, for he was a waggish fellow, he added, "If you're lucky he won't come at all."

Papa Chibou sank down on the prisoners' bench and raised his eyes to the tribunal opposite. His very marrow was chilled by the sight of The Terrible Trio. The chief judge,

Bertouf, was a vast puff of a man, who swelled out of his judicial chair like a poisonous fungus. His black robe was familiar with spilled brandy, and his dirty judicial bib was askew. His face was bibulous and brutal, and he had the wattles of a turkey gobbler. Judge Goblin, on his right, looked to have mummified; he was at least a hundred years old and had wrinkled parchment skin and red-rimmed eyes that glittered like the eyes of a cobra. Judge Perouse was one vast jungle of tangled grizzled whisker, from the midst of which projected a cockatoo's beak of a nose; he looked at Papa Chibou and licked his lips with a long pink tongue. Papa Chibou all but fainted; he felt no bigger than a pea, and less important; as for his judges, they seemed enormous monsters.

The first case was called, a young swaggering fellow who had stolen an orange from a pushcart.

"Ah, Monsieur Thief," rumbled Judge Bertouf with a scowl, "you are jaunty now. Will you be so jaunty a year from to-day when you are released from prison? I rather think not. Next case."

Papa Chibou's heart pumped with difficulty. A year for an orange—and he had stolen a man! His eyes roved round the room and he saw two guards carrying in something which they stood before the judges. It was Napoleon.

A guard tapped Papa Chibou on the shoulder. "You're next," he said.

"But my lawyer, Monsieur Dufayel——" began Papa Chibou.

"You're in hard luck," said the guard, "for here he comes."

Papa Chibou in a daze found himself in the prisoner's dock. He saw coming toward him a pale young man. Papa Chibou recognized him at once. It was the slender, erect young man of the museum. He was not very erect now; he was listless. He did not recognize Papa Chibou; he barely glanced at him.

"You stole something," said the young lawyer, and his voice was toneless. "The stolen goods were found in your room. I think we might better plead guilty and get it over with."

"Yes, monsieur," said Papa Chibou, for he had let go all his hold on hope. "But attend a moment. I have something—a message for you."

Papa Chibou fumbled through his pockets and at last found the card of the American girl with the bright dark eyes. He handed it to Georges Dufayel.

"She left it with me to give to you," said Papa Chibou. "I was chief watchman at the Musée Pratoucy, you know. She came there night after night, to wait for you."

The young man gripped the sides of the card with both hands; his face, his eyes, everything about him seemed suddenly charged with new life.

"Ten thousand million devils!" he cried. "And I doubted her! I owe you much, monsieur. I owe you everything." He wrung Papa Chibou's hand.

Judge Bertouf gave an impatient judicial grunt.

"We are ready to hear your case, Advocate Dufayel," said the judge, "if you have one."

The court attendants sniggered.

"A little moment, monsieur the judge," said the lawyer. He turned to Papa Chibou. "Quick," he shot out, "tell me about the crime you are charged with. What did you steal?"

"Him," replied Papa Chibou, pointing.

"That dummy of Napoleon?"

Papa Chibou nodded.

"But why?"

Papa Chibou shrugged his shoulders.

"Monsieur could not understand."

"But you must tell me!" said the lawyer urgently. "I must make a plea for you. These savages will be severe enough, in any event; but I may be able to do something. Quick; why did you steal this Napoleon?"

"I was his friend," said Papa Chibou. "The museum failed. They were going to sell Napoleon for junk, Monsieur Dufayel. He was my friend. I could not desert him."

The eyes of the young advocate had caught fire; they were lit with a flash. He brought his fist down on the table.

"Enough!" he cried.

Then he rose in his place and addressed the court. His voice was low, vibrant and passionate; the judges, in spite of themselves, leaned forward to listen to him.

"May it please the honourable judges of this court of France," he began, "my client is guilty. Yes, I repeat in a

voice of thunder, for all France to hear, for the enemies of France to hear, for the whole wide world to hear, he is guilty. He did steal this figure of Napoleon, the lawful property of another. I do not deny it. This old man, Jerome Chibou, is guilty, and I for one am proud of his guilt."

Judge Bertouf grunted.

"If your client is guilty, Advocate Dufayel," he said, "that settles it. Despite your pride in his guilt, which is a peculiar notion, I confess, I am going to sentence him to——"

"But wait, your honour!" Dufayel's voice was compelling. "You must, you shall hear me! Before you pass sentence on this old man, let me ask you a question."

"Well?"

"Are you a Frenchman, Judge Bertouf?"

"But certainly."

"And you love France?"

"Monsieur has not the effrontery to suggest otherwise?"

"No. I was sure of it. That is why you will listen to me."

"I listen."

"I repeat then: Jerome Chibou is guilty. In the law's eyes he is a criminal. But in the eyes of France and those who love her his guilt is a glorious guilt; his guilt is more honourable than innocence itself."

The three judges looked at one another blankly; Papa Chibou regarded his lawyer with wide eyes; Georges Dufayel spoke on.

"These are times of turmoil and change in our country, messieurs the judges. Proud traditions which were once the birthright of every Frenchman have been allowed to decay. Enemies beset us within and without. Youth grows careless of that honour which is the soul of a nation. Youth forgets the priceless heritages of the ages, the great names that once brought glory to France in the past, when Frenchmen were Frenchmen. There are some in France who may have forgotten the respect due a nation's great"—here Advocate Dufayel looked very hard at the judges—"but there are a few patriots left who have not forgotten. And there sits one of them."

"This poor old man has deep within him a glowing devotion to France. You may say that he is a simple, unlettered

peasant. You may say that he is a thief. But I say, and true Frenchmen will say with me, that he is a patriot, messieurs the judges. He loves Napoleon. He loves him for what he did for France. He loves him because in Napoleon burned that spirit which has made France great. There was a time, messieurs the judges, when your fathers and mine dared share that love for a great leader. Need I remind you of the career of Napoleon? I know I need not. Need I tell you of his victories? I know I need not."

Nevertheless, Advocate Dufayel did tell them of the career of Napoleon. With a wealth of detail and many gestures he traced the rise of Napoleon; he lingered over his battles; for an hour and ten minutes he spoke eloquently of Napoleon and his part in the history of France.

"You may have forgotten," he concluded, "and others may have forgotten, but this old man sitting here a prisoner—he did not forget. When mercenary scoundrels wanted to throw on the junk heap this effigy of one of France's greatest sons, who was it that saved him? Was it you, messieurs the judges? Was it I? Alas, no. It was a poor old man who loved Napoleon more than he loved himself. Consider, messieurs the judges; they were going to throw on the junk heap Napoleon—France's Napoleon—our Napoleon. Who would save him? Then up rose this man, this Jerome Chibou, whom you would brand as a thief, and he cried aloud for France and for the whole world to hear, 'Stop! Desecraters of Napoleon, stop! There still lives one Frenchman who loves the memories of his native land; there is still one patriot left. I, I, Jerome Chibou, will save Napoleon!' And he did save him, messieurs the judges."

Advocate Dufayel mopped his brow, and levelling an accusing finger at The Terrible Trio he said, "You may send Jerome Chibou to jail. But when you do, remember this: You are sending to jail the spirit of France. You may find Jerome Chibou guilty. But when you do, remember this: You are condemning a man for love of country, for love of France. Wherever true hearts beat in French bosoms, messieurs the judges, there will the crime of Jerome Chibou be understood, and there will the name of Jerome Chibou be honoured. Put him in prison, messieurs the judges. Load his poor feeble old body with chains. And a nation will

tear down the prison walls, break his chains, and pay homage to the man who loved Napoleon and France so much that he was willing to sacrifice himself on the altar of patriotism."

Advocate Dufayel sat down; Papa Chibou raised his eyes to the judges' bench. Judge Perouse was ostentatiously blowing his beak of a nose. Judge Goblin, who wore a Sedan ribbon in his buttonhole, was sniffing into his inkwell. And Chief Judge Bertouf was openly blubbing.

"Jerome Chibou, stand up." It was Chief Judge Bertouf who spoke, and his voice was thick with emotion.

Papa Chibou, quaking, stood up. A hand like a hand of pink bananas was thrust down at him.

"Jerome Chibou," said Chief Judge Bertouf, "I find you guilty. Your crime is patriotism in the first degree. I sentence you to freedom. Let me have the honour of shaking the hand of a true Frenchman."

"And I," said Judge Goblin, thrusting out a hand as dry as autumn leaves.

"And I also," said Judge Perouse, reaching out a hairy hand.

"And, furthermore," said Chief Judge Bertouf, "you shall continue to protect the Napoleon you saved. I subscribe a hundred francs to buy him for you."

"And I," said Judge Goblin.

"And I also," said Judge Perouse.

As they left the court room, Advocate Dufayel, Papa Chibou and Napoleon, Papa Chibou turned to his lawyer.

"I can never repay monsieur," he began.

"Nonsense!" said the lawyer.

"And would Monsieur Dufayel mind telling me again the last name of Napoleon?"

"Why, Bonaparte, of course. Surely you knew——"

"Alas, no, Monsieur Dufayel. I am a man the most ignorant. I did not know that my friend had done such great things."

"You didn't? Then what in the name of heaven did you think Napoleon was?"

"A sort of murderer," said Papa Chibou humbly.

Out beyond the walls of Paris in a garden stands the villa of Georges Dufayel, who has become, everyone says, the most

eloquent and successful young lawyer in the Paris courts. He lives there with his wife, who has bright dark eyes. To get to his house one must pass a tiny gatehouse, where lives a small old man with a prodigious walrus moustache. Visitors who peer into the gatehouse as they pass sometimes get a shock, for standing in one corner of its only room they see another small man, in uniform and a big hat. He never moves, but stands there by the window all day, one hand in the bosom of his coat, the other at his side, while his eyes look out over the garden. He is waiting for Papa Chibou to come home after his work among the asparagus beds to tell him the jokes and the news of the day.

TOWERS OF FAME

BY ELIZABETH IRONS FOLSOM

From *McClure's*

HE RAISED his voice to bar interruption. "You cannot tell anything about any one. Romance survives where you least expect it. Would you look for it in Eric Hall, for instance? Would you suspect him of Romance?"

"Well, hardly," said one of the listeners. "Not that calculating, cold man—all indifference. Just to make your point, don't try to prove that *he* has known sentiment."

"More than most men," replied Kent. "I have a notion to tell you about him. I *will* tell you. Come closer, Janet—all of you—to hear the unbelievable."

"About Judge Eric Hall who knows only power—fame!" They laughed.

"Yes, about him."

"How do *you* happen to know?"

"He told me."

"Did he expect you to tell?"

"Heaven knows what a man expects when he babbles."

Dinner was over; coffee was being served in the big, candle-lit drawing room. The guests had made little intimate groups; some one at the piano at the far end of the room touched half strains between talk and laughter. The group in the deep window drew closer to Kent, and made themselves comfortable.

"'Babbles' is what I said," went on the speaker, rolling a cigarette with deliberation, "but that is the wrong word. We were old friends: in fact, I was responsible for the whole thing, for I had talked about the queer town in one of the

Middle Western states. Eric is the kind who always wants to know, so when he happened to be in that part of the state, he hired a car and drove out to see for himself."

"I've heard of that town," declared Janet eagerly. "There is no other like it, is there?"

Kent passed over the question.

"I'll tell it exactly as he told me. I'm sure I can. I could not forget it. He had driven ten miles through dust and wind with a thunderstorm rolling up ahead of him—purple storm with green fringe on it—the kind they have out there. He was whacking along when he caught sight of a sign by the roadside. He stopped and backed his car to read it. It said—I remember it exactly—it said:

SMOKING, DRINKING, PROFANITY, FORBIDDEN AS YOU PASS THROUGH THIS TOWN.

YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO POLLUTE THE AIR.

MOST PEOPLE ARE BAD. MOST PEOPLE LIE, STEAL, AND DRINK.

"Oh! Truly!" gasped Janet.

"It was what Eric was looking for—the entrance to the town of fanatics. There was a blank-looking group of houses marked at intervals by tall, white board signs—black letters on a white ground. He drove slowly. It was Sunday and the stillness was absolute. There was a building that might be a hotel—on the veranda were vacant chairs tilted against the rail; a few shops, gray with closed doors; houses gray, too, all with doors shut tight, curtains made to screen. The main street, three or four blocks long, was deserted. At a far corner a man appeared, took a look at the coming car, and stepped out of sight. A woman who came out on her porch, slipped back, and shut the door sharply. She was gray, too—clothes and hair; the distant man had seemed gray—a brown-gray, like the dust that whirled.

"He stopped the car again to read another sign, this one

as large as a house front, full of preachments, repeating the words that he had first read:

MOST PEOPLE ARE BAD. THEY LIE, STEAL,
AND DRINK.

NO OUTSIDE PEOPLE OR INSTITUTIONS
WANTED HERE.

THE DANCE IS OF THE DEVIL, THE
THEATRES ARE DEVIL-BEGOTTEN.

“And again:

MOST PEOPLE ARE BAD. THEY LIE, STEAL,
AND DRINK.

“As he stood reading, he was conscious that men had appeared in the streets ahead and behind him. They fitted the houses—brown-gray, closed, shut tight. They walked slowly, eyes on the ground, but, as they passed him, he had a look from each. The looks were alike: ominous—hate snapped out at him from under briefly raised lids. Each face had a set mouth, with slashes down from its corners. Each head that turned slightly had—menace—hostile promises.

“The storm was breaking: a flash of lightning swept down the street; thunder crashed; for a moment the wind ceased—it hung aloof and the calm was thick with the brown-gray of the town—with deep silence. A desert plain, a skiff alone on the ocean, would have been more friendly, he said.”

“Where is the Romance?” some one asked, as Kent stopped.

“It’s at hand. It crossed the street in front of his car just as the wind came tearing like a railroad train. He saw her face for an instant before it caught her. Well, folks—I can’t tell you how Eric spoke of her face. He forgot that he had ever seen a court room or a law office, or had known indifference or ambition. He said to me—I can see him as he rapped the table and forgot he was speaking—‘The face of that girl, Kent!’ And—can you believe it of Eric?—he

went on: 'Do you remember Raphael's peasant girl? The one with parted lips and queer, asking eyes? She was exactly like her. The wind took her sunbonnet away. She had two long braids of hair. She stopped and stared at me, her long, brown-gray skirt twisting about her little flat shoes. Then she ran on, clutching her braids, and a near door slammed after her.'

"The wind was on then; the few trees bent before it.

"The rain was close. There was no protection and, acting on impulse, he drove the car back of the huge sign. It was a shield from the wind and a slight protection against the slanting rain.

"Eric said it had been years since he had seen a Western storm, where it lets loose and whoops 'er up. He was half blinded with the lightning; he could hear the smash of small buildings; the rattling scurry of débris blown by the wind. His own shelter shivered, creaked. It was braced strongly from the back, but he thought it more than likely that it would go. Across the street he heard one go down with a splitting thud.

"But as he waited, he was conscious, he said, only of the girl who was somewhere in that strange town. I'd like to have had you—you people who think you know Eric—watch him as he told me this. There was not a drop of blood in his body, to judge from the colour of his face; his fingers twitched. He talked because he had to talk to some one, I guess. He was not self-sufficient just then."

"Hm-m," said some one. "I don't get him in that rôle, and still I do, too, in a way: the force in him could be applied as well to an —er—infatuation as to anything else. I suppose it *was* an infatuation, eh, Kent? They are strange things, but they wear off."

"Go on," said Janet.

"He said that he sat there in the car while the wind bent his board protection and the rain came in sheets. He was wet through from the spray where it struck the outer edge of the car. He sat and watched pictures of that girl's face: they came through the rain; came into the lightning; came everywhere. He was half conscious, he said, absorbed in the new thing.

"Out of that state of mind—he told a lot about that; it

seemed to puzzle him as it does us now—he was startled by a new gale of wind, a close splitting of boards, the shriek of wood parting from wood at his elbow; and then the whole great shield tottered, swayed, resisted, swayed again, and came down over him. He ducked his head. A moment later he discovered that, in falling, the sign had gone into some trees standing close and was held there, in half-tent fashion, so that it protected him from the rain. Then he saw, too, some one clinging to the slanting edge of the shield. He leaped from the car and caught her as she fell.

“Her clothes were dripping with water; there was a trickle of blood down one cheek. But she was not unconscious and she struggled in his arms. He made her sit down on the running board of the car. Then he asked if she was hurt and she shook her head. He asked her how she happened to be there back of the sign and she shook her head again. He sat down beside her and watched her. He spoke to me about ‘filling his eyes with her for the rest of his life’—and other things that Eric would not have said normally—or if he had not been—er—infatuated. That was the word, wasn’t it?

“They sat there a long time without speaking, and she kept her eyes closed. The wind died away, but the rain persisted—a steady downpour; the green-gray of the storm daylight changed into the black-gray of steady rain. He waited.

“When she opened her eyes, he asked again how she happened to be there. After much urging she answered him,

“‘They turned me out of the house,’ she said.

“‘Turned you out!’ he repeated, incredulously. ‘In this storm! From your home! Why? What had you done?’

“‘I had stopped and looked at you,’ she answered simply.

“‘What?’ Eric put force into the word when he spoke it.

“‘I had looked at you. Stopped and looked. It was a sin. After that, I could not be allowed to live with those who were not sinners,’ she explained.

“‘I never heard of such a thing!’ he told her. ‘Are they crazy?’

“‘The signs tell you. It is their belief. It was a sin to have looked at you—and remembered.’

“Eric’s blood was racing; she had remembered! Looked at him, and remembered.

“‘Don’t worry. Just tell me,’ he urged.

“She told him. He did not tell me just what she said, but I could guess as I watched the light back in his eyes. Her father had opened the door and put her out in the rain as a wanton. He was very strict—father. As soon as the rain was over she would go to the other end of town where she had a friend who would take her in. No, she did not believe as her father and the people of the town believed; her mother had taken her away and she had been brought up differently, but when the mother had died, he had brought her back.

“‘My mother could not bear it here,’ she said. ‘I am not so brave as she, or I would go.’”

“Go on,” said Janet again.

“It’s a good story, isn’t it? Especially since we have our own opinions concerning him. No king of lovers, no Romeo, no schoolboy, could have told such a tale of first love as Eric told me. Spilled it out. Words tumbling over each other.

“In one look, in one half hour, it seemed, he had turned over all the principles upon which we live here in New York. The primal had taken him—and her, too. She was not afraid; not frightened at what she must have seen in him.

“‘And why, when he turned you out, did you come in here?’ he asked finally.

“He had never before listened for an answer as he listened for that one.

“‘I came because you were here,’ she said.

“Well, people—I began to see then what he was up against in the way of intoxication. He had not touched her; it had been all very aloof, but when she told him why she had come, he said he would have been wooden if he had not gathered her close and held her tight.

“Then, through the slackening rainfall, he heard footsteps outside their shelter, heard them on the soft ground close by, saw a stooped figure straighten under their tipped roof. It was one of the all-alike, brown-gray men with jammed-shut mouth and slashes down from it; with hate-filled eyes.

“This man levelled his finger at Eric. ‘Now ye kin have her,’ he said harshly. ‘Ye kin take her along o’ ye. There’s no door open in this town for such as her. They’re shut

against her for ever. This is no place for her ever again. We're done. All o' us.'

"She sprang forward. 'Father!' she cried.

"He struck her with his open hand straight across the mouth.

"'Harlot! Plaything o' strange men!' he accused, scornfully.

"Eric said that he reached for the man, but that she spread her arms between them.

"'No!' she exclaimed. 'He believes it! He cannot help it. No, no!'

"The man did not speak again. He stooped under the slanting boards and went away.

"And now comes what Eric says was the strangest part of it—the way he took it. Back of the glamour of the girl's lovely face; back of the pull of her, standing there in the slackening rain holding her wet skirts about her, her neck bare; back of the wonder of her, there rose a bank of his sane self—that self indifferent to all else. There towered a steeple of his future as he had planned it; of his ambitions; of his wealth and fame which were just beginning and for which he had worked hard. They grew—these steeples—and pushed closer. The girl watched him.

"She had not spoken to him since her father had gone away; she had stood aside while Eric got the car out upon the road; she had followed him to it and stood there clasping her bare elbows—lips parted like the Raphael girl-child, he said. She was oblivious to watchers behind drawn curtains.

"'Now what shall you do?' he asked her. 'Does he mean it?'

"'Yes, he means it. I shall walk to the next town. There will be something for me to do there.'

"'I'm sorry——' he began, all the steeples crowding around him.

"'Don't be. I'm glad. It gives me a chance to be brave as she was.'

"She put up one hand to her mouth and pressed her lips tight with it.

"'It's odd, isn't it?' she asked.

"He says he did not need to ask what was odd. He knew. It was the sudden new thing which was his—and hers. But

the steeples were nearer. And a free life was what he had planned; it alone could bring him what he wanted. But he asked:

“‘Will you come with me, as he said?’

“She shook her head.

“‘Oh, no. I am not your kind.’

“‘But I love you,’ he told her then. You should have heard him speak those three words, the day he told me the story. Another man surely—not the Eric we know. He said it twice: ‘I love you.’

“‘And I you,’ the girl replied.

“‘Then come with me,’ he pleaded.

“‘No. It will pass. It cannot be the real thing. It was too quick for that.’

“She smiled, and he tried to laugh and say, without too much earnestness:

“‘Shall I come back some day?’

“She shook her head again.

“‘Please don’t.’

“He climbed slowly into the car, legs weighted, he said. He looked back as he gathered speed on the hard road. She was walking too slowly it seemed to him—her head too low——

“But everywhere were the steeples of fame and fortune to come if he were unhampered; if he could be always indifferent. The west had red streaks—— He drove away.”

“Oh, I hate the man!” cried Janet, indignantly. “It’s just like him! What became of her?”

“There she is now, at the end of the room,” said Kent, smiling at the evident astonishment of the group around him.

Eric Hall’s wife was lifting her coffee cup and laughing. Her filmy sleeves fell away from perfect arms; a jewel flashed from a tiny silver band in her hair. She was clearly the loveliest, the most distinguished woman there.

They stared at her.

“But you just said that he drove away!” some one exclaimed in amazement. “That was the drama of your story!”

“He drove back and got her,” finished Kent sententiously.

PHANTOM ADVENTURE

BY FLOYD DELL

From *Century*

I. A Secret. He was not a banker by temperament. But nobody in New York, nobody east of the Rockies, knew that. It was his secret.

When he graduated from college, instead of preparing himself seriously for life by cleaning the inkwells in some Wall Street institution, as an ambitious young man should, he got a job on a Western ranch. He did this for no better reason than that he had been fond of reading about cowboys. He learned many things about horses and cattle, and made friends with every cowboy within a hundred miles. Nevertheless, he was not satisfied; for cowboy life, while interesting enough in fact, is less romantically adventurous than in fiction. Yet he stayed there for five years, dreaming now of the sea and reading stories of sailor adventures.

Then an uncle died, leaving him a legacy of a little more than five thousand dollars. With five thousand dollars a young man could get started in business, and it was high time for him to do so. He went to San Francisco and looked about for an opening.

In a café he met a man who had just come back from incredible adventures in the South Seas. To this man's tales he listened all evening, and then went back to his lodging, where he could not sleep, but walked back and forth for hours in a little garden, dreaming, awake, of strange birds and strange trees and slim, brown, laughing girls with flowers in their hair.

Next morning he went down to the waterfront, and looked out thoughtfully in the direction of the South Seas. With his five thousand dollars he could buy or build a little boat

and, with some congenial companion, set sail for those islands of incredible adventure. But he knew that this was mere romantic folly, more worthy of a boy than of a man. He must begin to take life seriously. He shook his head and frowned, and went on to the café.

Every morning—sometimes it was noon—for a whole year he went down to the waterfront and looked out over the bay. And every afternoon and evening he sat in some café. At the end of the year he had made many friends and heard many curious tales, and his money was all gone.

He began to look for a job. He had an extensive convivial acquaintance among the business men of the town; but they did not seem to have any job for him, though they were willing to lend him a few dollars.

So he borrowed a little money and came to New York, where no one knew, as he expressed it, what a damn fool he was.

He took care that no one should know. He got a job in a Fifth Avenue bank, and when he was barely forty he was one of its vice-presidents. He had an apartment in town and a house in the country and a car and a wife and four lovely children, and he was proud of them all.

He was proud of being a sober and responsible citizen—proud of having conquered his romantic propensities. Perhaps his children knew, from the wild, half-true and half-imagined tales he told them at their bedtime hours, that he was still at heart a romantic adventurer. But nobody else, and least of all his sweet and sensible wife, suspected his secret.

II. A Conversation. In the summer of his fortieth year the town apartment had been closed, and his wife and children were in the country. He himself was going to the country in a day or two, as soon as he had cleared up those matters, whatever they are, that keep bankers in town in August. He stayed at his club until one evening on an impulse he went down to an out-of-the-way little street near Washington Square, in the hope of hearing some talk from a man who lived there, and whom he had been thinking of at intervals all day.

He was thinking of this man because he had read the night before, at the club, a story of his in a magazine. This man

was a writer of stories and lived in what was called Greenwich Village; and this particular story was one of romantic adventure in the South Seas. The story-writer's wife and the banker's wife had been friends from girlhood, and the story-writer and the banker were acquaintances of a sort. The banker was always a little aware in the other's presence of his own secret and foolish past. He was embarrassed when he talked of financial conditions by a fear and perhaps also a hope that the other would somehow see through him. Also he kept wondering if a writer imagined all his romantic adventures or if some of them had really happened. He particularly wondered this about the story he had read the night before at the club, for it gave such a vivid description of a South Sea island that it seemed as though it could only have been written by one who had lived there.

The story-writer was at home. His wife, he explained, was at the seashore with the children, and he was staying in town to do a story or two to pay their summer bills. He sat down again in his study, cocking up his feet on the typewriter desk and lighting a fresh cigarette.

"No, you're not interrupting me," he said. "Don't worry about that. I never get started to work till after midnight, and I want somebody to talk to while this new South Sea yarn ferments in my head. Have a cigarette." He started to talk. Again the banker had the feeling of guarding a secret.

It was nearly midnight when the conversation took a turn that promised to satisfy the banker's curiosities.

"It's odd," said the story-writer, and paused. "It's very odd. I'm supposed to be a respectable citizen. But consider these stories of mine. The hero, who is me, meets a beautiful girl and falls in love with her. Sometimes she is a princess, sometimes a chorus girl; just now she is usually a dusky maiden with flowers in her hair. I suppose I've met and made love to more than a hundred girls in the course of my literary career. To be sure, I always ask them to marry me; but I never tell them of all the other beautiful heroines I have loved and left behind me. And yet nobody thinks I'm a scoundrel. Not even my wife!"

"Of course not," said the banker. "That would be absurd."

"Yes, it would be unthinkable," said the story-writer. "For when I have finished one of my adventures, I mail it

to an editor and get a check for it. And that's exactly why my wife doesn't object. It pays the rent; and so it's perfectly all right for me to spend my life in extra-matrimonial love scenes. But why do I get paid for these adventures?" he went on meditatively. "Because people want adventures. When a man reads one of my romantic yarns, *he* becomes the hero, *he* makes love to beautiful, strange girls. And yet no one has thought of proposing laws to forbid married men to read love stories."

"After all," said the banker, ironically, "there is a slight difference between reading a love adventure and going out and having one."

"No," said the story-writer; "the difference is not slight; it is considerable. But just what is that difference? A love adventure in story form is guaranteed to be complete in itself, to be over when it is finished, and to leave behind it nothing but a pleasant memory in the reader's mind. In all these ways it differs from a love adventure in reality concerning which no such safe guarantees can be offered. We try to live orderly lives, and while the love adventures of reality may upset the well considered plans of a lifetime, the other kind leave everything exactly as it was. The heroine may swoon with ecstasy in your arms to-night; but she will not call you up on the telephone in the morning or write you passionate and compromising letters."

"Poor girl—she can't!" said the banker.

"She doesn't want to. It is only women of the real world who want love to be a part of life. She belongs to the world of romance, which has laws of its own."

"The world of fancy," said the banker.

"Don't pretend to despise the world of fancy," said the story-writer. "Fond as we are of the real world, it is far from satisfying all our demands. It is too inexorable. The phantom world of fancy is in many respects a more agreeable place. And everybody goes to it for solace. The sober triumphs of reality are never able for long to satisfy us; always we turn from those four-square actualities to live for a delightful hour in that extravagant land where our most impossible wishes can come true. It is a need of our human nature."

"Oh, no doubt," said the banker. "But nevertheless——"

The story-teller interrupted him.

"Have you thought of this? That the self which goes out adventuring in the land of fancy is not a part of this real life of ours, at all? It is a kind of phantom, existing joyously and irresponsibly in a phantom world."

"I hadn't thought of it just like that," said the banker, reflectively.

"But here is the real question. These adventurers in the phantom realm of fancy, *why do they never meet?*"

The banker stared.

"I'm not sure that I understand you."

"Suppose a man and a girl, unknown to each other, reading the same story at the same time; their phantom selves are sharing the same adventure, one that some writer has created for them. But suppose they dispense with the writer's assistance. Suppose these phantom selves should meet and create their own adventure. Why not?"

The banker stirred uneasily in his chair.

The story-writer laughed.

"It might happen."

"It might," said the banker.

"I wonder," said the story-writer, "what my wife would say if I told her of such an adventure. It would be like all my other adventures, more beautiful, perhaps, than any of the others. And yet——"

"I hope," said the banker, frowning, "that you——"

"Go to bed," said the story-writer, suddenly. "You'll find the guest room on the top floor. I'm going to get to work on my South Sea story. I'll call you up for coffee in the morning."

He took his feet down from the typewriter desk and threw away his cigarette. His hands hovered over the keyboard and already he had forgotten the outer world, including his guest, who rose and wandered uncertainly from the room.

III. The Ivory Gate. He found the guest room upstairs. But whether it was the faint clicking of the typewriter below that disturbed him, or his own thoughts, he was disinclined to sleep.

There was a pile of magazines on the table, and he began to read a story. It was the kind of story he had been fond of

all his life, an adventure and a strange meeting with a beautiful girl.

But he let the magazine slip to the floor. He was thinking of old times in San Francisco. He remembered that he had wanted to build a boat and sail to the South Seas.

"But I didn't!" he said to himself triumphantly.

No—a mocking thought came to remind him—he had stayed on shore and listened to café yarns.

But since then he had been sensible. He had been sensible for twelve years. Twelve years! In a sudden panic he wondered if his youth had slipped by and vanished with those years. He went over and gazed at himself in the mirror. He saw a man in the prime of life, strong and clear-eyed.

He did not want to go to bed; but perhaps a walk to the club would make him sleepy. He debated whether to disturb the man at work below to tell him, and decided he would not. He went downstairs quietly.

On the second floor he looked out to reassure himself as to the weather. The sky was a little cloudy, that was all. And then, as he stood there looking out of the hall window, he saw below him a little garden in the moonlight. He looked away quickly, but not in time, for he remembered a moonlit garden perched on one of the hills of San Francisco, where as a young man he had walked night after night dreaming impossible things. That memory was painful, and he hurried downstairs and took his hat to leave the house. But the pain of that memory was strangely sweet and afflicted him with a kind of nostalgia. He wanted to go out into this garden and be again the young fool he had been. He walked up and down the hall with his hat in his hand, wanting to go away and wanting to stay and dream in this garden. It was a queer thing. He had stopped drinking, and he had stopped dreaming, years ago; the desire for drink had never come back, but the desire for dreaming was upon him again. He felt that his whole life of triumphant common sense was at stake. But no, it couldn't be. An hour in a moonlit garden could not undo the solid achievement of twelve years. He put his hat back on the stand. With a guilty feeling of having yielded to a weakness, he went quietly out, past the door from behind which came the inspired click of typewriter keys fashioning some strange adventure.

In the garden he stood and looked about. There was a full moon above, dimmed with clouds and casting that half-light which transforms the accustomed world into the realm of fancy. *On such a night as this*—Odd bits of poetry, remembered from his youth, came into his mind.

Across from where he stood was a high board fence, and in it a gate, painted ivory-white. He had an impulse to go over and open it. But instead he stood still, mockingly analysing that impulse. "In a story," he said to himself, "there would be an adventure waiting in the next garden. But in real life, as I well know, there is only another garden, like this, with no one there. People do not moon about in gardens."

But then he reflected, "I am mooning about in a garden." Realizing that bankers do not do such things, it seemed to him that he was not a banker, but, as his friend had said, a phantom in a phantom world where impossible things come true.

He surrendered himself for a moment to this feeling, and began to think foolish thoughts, such as he had not thought for twelve years.

"What if there should be an adventure waiting for me on the other side of that gate? What if there were a girl in that garden, waiting?" These thoughts were frightening, and nevertheless they made him happy.

Then his common sense reasserted itself. There was nothing in that other garden, and he was being a damn fool. He reflected gratefully that no one would ever know what a damn fool he was. The depositors at the bank could never guess, nor could his wife. And since there was nothing on the other side of the gate, he might as well go and open it and look into the garden, and then go back to bed.

He walked over to the gate, and there he paused. Why trouble himself to prove what he already knew? Why not keep intact the memory of this absurd fancy and have the pleasure of thinking that perhaps, after all, there had been an adventure waiting beyond that gate?

He realized that if he opened the gate and nothing happened, it would hurt. He put his hand on the latch in a mood curiously like the mood of prayer. If he had had a God to whom such a prayer could be addressed, he might have prayed, that just this once—— But his was no pagan deity,

and so he did not pray. Lacking the courage that prayer sometimes gives, he took his hand from the latch.

Then he remembered how he had gone down to the waterfront every morning and looked out over the bay and never set sail for the islands of romance; and he felt that this was a test. It didn't make any difference what happened: he couldn't turn back.

He pushed open the gate softly.

Seated on a little wooden bench was a girl; her face was turned away from him, but he could see the languid sweep of a slender arm, bare and beautiful.

One last reminder of his ordinary self intruded into his mind, the façade of the bank on Fifth Avenue, symbol of twelve years of sturdy effort in the realm of common sense. But it seemed to have no relation whatever to this moment, and it faded and was gone.

He stood looking at the girl for the space of a breath; then he walked over to her through a tangle of moonlight that broke through the branches of an elm.

IV. *Afterward.* The milk wagons were rattling over the streets when he went back through the ivory gate, and he could hear the typewriter still clattering within the house. He went silently to the guest room. The adventure was over, and now he had to think about its relation to actuality. But he did not think; he fell asleep.

At the bank there were other matters to occupy his mind. On the train to the country that afternoon there was a neighbour who talked about financial conditions. At the end of the ride there was his wife's welcome and the children climbing into his arms. It wasn't until after dinner that he had any time to think.

He was rather surprised at his thoughts. They were, first of all, thoughts of relief at being back at home. It was as if he had strayed for a few hours out of time and space, and was happy to find himself again safely within the cosy contours of the familiar. He was glad to be back in a world that had a meaning beyond the moment, a world that reached back in memory and forward in hope, the world of reality.

As a happy citizen of this comfortable world, he was nat-

urally concerned with the inquiry whether his position in it had been endangered by last night's adventure. And it seemed to him that he need have no fear. That adventure was a thing utterly apart from all the rest of his life—a thing complete and perfect in itself, with no sequel to be feared or hoped for; they did not even know each other's names. She herself had preferred that it should be so.

"And," she had said, "you needn't fear that it will ever be made commonplace by our meeting at a tea somewhere; you will never see me again." And he had said, laughing:

"You speak as though you were going to die or going on a very long journey!"

"Yes," she said; "something like that. You mustn't ask me about it, only take my word for it."

And he believed her. Why, he did not know. But to-day he was glad to be so sure that their adventure was ended and that no one but themselves could ever know about it.

. . . He had asked his friend the story-writer over their morning coffee:

"Who lives in that little white house next door, a writer?" and was told, "A school-teacher, I believe." Evidently his friend did not know of the school-teacher's guest. No; so far as all the world was concerned, there had been no midnight adventure. It was as detached from reality, as immaterial from any common-sense point of view, as if it had been merely a story he had read in a magazine that night. He might, if he wished, think of it as that.

He was a little startled, as by an odd coincidence, when his wife asked: "Shall I read you a story? The new magazines have come." But really it was no coincidence at all, for she knew that he liked magazine stories and enjoyed being read to in the evenings. The thing had happened many times before; nevertheless, it was a little strange to be listening to such a story, while in and out of his mind there flashed bright memories of another story.

"Why always the South Seas, I wonder?" his wife paused to remark, looking up from the big chair where she sat with the magazine in her lap. "I suppose it *is* a more romantic place."

"Yes, perhaps," he said.

He had talked to that girl last night about the South Seas; he had said he would like to take her there to see the strange

birds and flowers. And she had told him about Venice. And while they talked of sailboats and gondolas, they were sitting on a garden bench.

"He gets the romantic atmosphere rather well, doesn't he?" said his wife. "I think I can guess which one of the girls he is going to fall in love with, the one with the red hibiscus flower in her hair. What do you think?"

"Very likely," he agreed.

Who was she, the girl of last night's story? He couldn't guess. She wasn't young, as girls in stories are; there were even tragic lines marring the beauty of what had been a lovely face. But her eyes were incredibly young—the eyes of a child, full of wild dreams. Perhaps, in her ordinary life, she was some one quite different from what she had been that night—as different as he had been from his ordinary self. None of his friends would have recognized *him* as the romantic wanderer whom she had held for a moment in her arms. He had even quoted poetry to her. *On such a night as this—* Well, he didn't care; it had not been sham. It was another part of himself. And she? It did not matter what she was to her friends. Last night she had been his strange and lovely playmate.

His wife looked up from the magazine.

"A little improbable, don't you think?"

Many things were improbable, he reflected. That room last night, with its flowers and tall candles.

"This isn't my place, you know," she had said. "Shall I tell you the story? It belongs to a school-teacher, a queer little old-maidish person one would have thought if one had seen her in her schoolroom, no doubt. She invested all her savings in oil stock; and contrary to what you might expect, she made a fortune,—oh, just a little fortune, but enough to last *her* for the rest of her life. And she bought this house in Greenwich Village, and fitted up this room as a place for romantic things to happen in. But nothing romantic happened. So yesterday, when we met—she was going away on a visit, and I was in town for a day and a night, on my way somewhere else—well, we became very quickly acquainted, and she wanted me to stay here. I was thinking of her when you walked into her garden to-night. Shall I tell you? I think that she believed *I* was the sort of person

to whom romantic things do happen, and that if I were here this room of hers would fulfil its destiny. Is it shameless of me to tell you that?"

"It's beautiful of you to tell me that," and he took her in his arms, no longer wondering how this adventure would end.

"I don't like her." It was his wife, speaking of the heroine of the story she was reading.

"Why not?"

"She isn't real."

He looked at his wife. She was real. And that was better than being the phantom creature of a lovely moment. Why should she begrudge the other kind of girl her moment?

It was odd; he wasn't in the least ashamed. Men, he remembered, sometimes had bad consciences over things like this, they were driven to confession by remorse. But he had nothing to be sorry for. Why should he confess?

His wife laid the magazine aside a little petulantly.

"Oh, well," she said, "it's just a story."

"Yes," he said absently, "just a story."

V. *The Face*. It was a fortnight before he went back to town. That evening he invited his friend the story-writer to dinner, and they talked. And, as it seemed, by accident, their talk touched upon the subject of neighbours.

"Is Greenwich Village any different in that way from up-town? Do you know your school-teacher neighbour in the little white house next door, for instance?" Surely, he thought, it could not be rash to ask that. Certainly his friend would not suspect him of a personal interest in an old-maid school-teacher. So he was thinking when he heard, "She died there to-day."

Afterward he could hardly believe what had happened except that a wild conviction came into his mind, whirling him out of his chair, out of the restaurant. He wandered somewhere, with one thought in his mind:

He must see that dead face.

Then he found himself in a house, in that house, among a fluttered group of school-teachers, who talked to him about the woman who had died. They took him for one of her family. He did not talk to them. He went up a stairway and into a room with faded flowers and tall candles ranged

about a high bed like an altar. A dead woman lay there, with a sheet drawn over her face. He lifted the cloth and looked at her face and went away silently.

VI. *The Confession.* It was queer, he knew, this impulse to confess that haunted him day and night. When she had been alive he had never wished to speak the words that might set him free to seek again the strange solace of her lips and arms. But now that she was for ever out of reach, he felt this mad compulsion to make known their shadowy love.

To speak now would be to risk losing all the happiness he had built up for himself in the real world, out of an inexplicable loyalty to the memory of his dead playmate. But he could not think of such things now. He could think only of the dreamer who had decked a room for a beautiful adventure that did not come, and who sat in a garden waiting, wondering whether death would come before the adventure; and of a gate that swung open one moonlit night to make her dream come true, and of two adventurers happy for an uncalendared hour in the phantom world of fancy. The time would come, his reason urged, when this memory would be a thing remote and forgotten, when it would no longer hold for him even the ache of regret, when its pathos even would be faded, as its bright joys were already fading in his thoughts. He would be sorry to have spoken. He would know that he had been a fool to speak. But now, though he lost everything that would one day be dear to him again, he did not care.

He fought against that mad impulse while he could. Then, lest he blurt the thing out suddenly, he began to plan the manner of his confession.

He remembered a fantastic idea uttered that night by the story-writer and he thought, "It will be easier to tell it to her first as a story."

And one evening he told her the story.

He began haltingly enough, constrained as he was to present to her imagination these two nameless figures of a man and a woman who had wished rashly for a happiness not to be had within the solid confines of reality; but as he talked, he forgot all else, and his confession became a passionate vindication of the rights of that phantom self for which the workaday world has so little use, and which can achieve only a pitiful

and momentary freedom in what the world calls folly. Then, for he had come to the end of his tale, in that picture of a room with its faded flowers and spent candles and a face whose eyes were no longer bright with wild dreams, abruptly he ceased speaking. And it seemed to him that even without as yet naming himself, he had confessed his crime of secret rebellion against the wisdom of the world.

He looked up and saw that there were tears in his wife's eyes.

"It's true," she said. "Women do feel like that."

He was bewildered.

"All women," she went on. "But I didn't think men knew. How *did* you know?"

He was about to tell her how he knew, when she spoke again, softly.

"I'm glad she found so beautiful a lover."

Then he was ashamed, of what, he hardly knew, unless it was of what he seemed to his wife. Herealized that he was to her merely what he had laboured for twelve years to seem to all the world. Not the foolish adventurer of his tale; no, she could never believe that. He imagined how it would sound to her if he pretended to be that man in the story. It would be the strangest argument in the annals of marriage. He could prove nothing; his secret was fatally secure. She would say, "You have dreamed it, dear."

And seeing himself with her eyes, he was shaken by a doubt. Perhaps it *had* been just a dream.

VII. Catharsis. But presently a thought of bitter comfort came; he would tell his friend the story-writer, who would do what was after all the only sensible thing to do with a dream in this world, sell it to other dreamers.

And after a time that was what happened.

THE DISTANT STREET

BY FRANCIS EDWARDS FARAGOH

From *The New Pearson's*
(Pearson's Magazine, 157 E. Ohio St., Chicago, Ill.)

ON THE sidewalk pools of yellow light. Stretches of evening-tinted pavement between them, around them. Gray pavement, with touches of black. To Emmanuel, as he stood in the uncertainly lighted doorway of the college building, the street called out. The yellow pools leaped out of their own flatness; they sang and touched his hands.

Still, he dared not leave the doorway. Every evening it was the same. The street was not for him. The yellow bits of sidewalk, stealing their gold from the lights of the soft-curtained doors, low windows along the street, were not his. He was an outsider. For three years, ever since he had started going to the college, he had known that. And now, again, he felt that he would always remain an outsider.

Sometimes, during the day, Emmanuel would look out of the window of one of the classrooms and try to understand the street. But while daylight was on the pavements, the street was very much like other streets. It was only in the evening that it became alluring, that it became forbidding, throwing light-kisses that were not for him.

No, it would not be wise to go into the street, thought Emmanuel. But he knew that, although impotent rage was causing his legs to tremble, he loved all the hasty-gabled houses and arched doorways, the lawns with their now dusky smiles. This street had a song about it. His own street—that other one, downtown, under the humpbacked shadow of the Williamsburg bridge—had no song. It had only butcher shops and fruit stands and grimy children and smells. Garbage cans and stoops that were unswept and slouching houses which pushed their bellies out into the evening and grinned.

Emmanuel waited in the doorway. Someone would come out. Someone always did. Then, together, it would be easier to face the street, talking in fast, loud sentences to shut out the song. He peered into the building. Yes, someone was approaching. Luck! He knew the man, one of his classmates. He knew, also, that he would not be considered welcome by the other. But that didn't matter. Anything rather than walk alone. . . .

"Are you going to the Subway?" He tried to conceal his anxiety, desperately forcing the question to be casual.

"Why . . . yes!" Not cordial, just as Emmanuel had expected. They thought him queer . . . Well . . . The main thing was that he'd not have to walk to the subway alone. Blocks and blocks.

"Anything happen in the psychiatry class? I cut it, you know." Had to make conversation! Oh, anything. . . . The street . . .

"No. Nothing much. Old man Hedley gassed some more about maniac-depressives. Usual stuff."

Hedley . . . that was the professor . . . maniac-depressives . . . oh, yes, maniac-depressives . . . (Was that somebody laughing up in that window, behind those flowers? A girl) . . . maniac . . .

"He . . . he didn't. . . . (A girl! Her body can't be seen, but she must have white shoulders, smiling through the transparent crimson shawl!) . . . let me see . . . oh, yes . . . he didn't say when those paranoia reports are due?"

"No."

"He didn't! That's funny!" Emmanuel began to laugh softly. He could feel, without actually seeing it, that the other threw him a questioning troubled glance from the corner of his eye. That made him laugh more. The fool! He didn't know that the laughter belonged to the girl behind the flowers, to the girl who must have silken eyes and a soft throat. "Well, I guess I'll cut to-morrow again."

"Yes?" Without interest.

"Yes!" A warmth came over Emmanuel. He felt himself getting angry, at what he didn't know. "Yes! I'll cut it as many times as I damn feel like it. See?" He realized

that this required an explanation. "I'm no good at the stuff. I don't want to be good at it. I'll never be a doctor. I hate the thought of ever being a doctor."

"Then why did you come to the school?" In spite of himself the man was compelled to ask. He was amazed at the fury in Emmanuel's words. "Why did you take up medicine?"

"Why? What the hell do you ask me that for? Don't you know?" Emmanuel wasn't listening to himself. The questions had come out of his mouth almost automatically. This was not his only conversation of the kind. Just now he was paying attention to the piano that was being played in a house up the street. "No, I guess you can't know," his mouth continued. "You're not a Jew."

"What has that to do with it?"

A wailing chord . . . was there some regret in that music? Who played it? Another girl? One with seeking eyes?

"Everything! When you're a Jew your family works for you . . . your father, your mother, sisters even . . . and you study. And all the time they look at you so hungry, so impatient, demanding that you hurry, hurry, through college, through all your years. That you make money. That's what they want. And then they've got their damned pride, too. You must become a professional man. A lawyer, a doctor . . . God, their rotten selfishness! Always driving you, hungry, exacting. . . ."

The other was frightened. Emmanuel knew that and he grinned with pleasure. He was flattered. Frightened—of him. That was good! He heard the uncertain tone:

"Well, what would you like to do instead?"

Ah . . . It had come! Emmanuel stopped. Under his feet a yellow patch of light, on his hair, uncovered now as he snatched off his hat, the notes of the piano rested for a moment before rushing along the street. Emmanuel could see the chords in the air, he told himself. They glowed. There were flames in them. He threw out his arms, indicating the street:

"This! This is what I'd like to do!"

His companion also had to stop. Out of bewildered gray eyes he looked at Emmanuel. He didn't understand, of course.

"This?"

"This! You hear that music . . . ?" He stepped closer to the man, grabbed his lapels. "You hear it? I could do that!"

"Do it?" Absolutely terrified! Emmanuel grinned with satisfaction. He released him. "Why, do you play an instrument?"

"No . . . no . . ." What a fool! But why should he understand?

"Oh, you compose . . ."

Idiot!

"I don't have to compose! I don't have to play!" Snarling: "I said I could *do* it. You don't have to know a note to do it . . . It's just got to be in you . . ." His hands dropped. A silly smile came into his face. What's the use? "I guess I can't explain. I don't know myself exactly what I mean. Take the sky, for instance. It's like a banner. That's it, a torn banner. Well, I could do that, too! Not paint it, or write about it, though. Something else . . ."

The other had left him. Emmanuel looked after the hurrying man and he knew that an empty papier-mâché figure was going there, a papier-mâché figure made of flesh, curiously, and that terror was dogging the steps of that figure. Let him run! Let him think that he, Emmanuel Wolkowitz, is a lunatic! Let him run. Now, now he was not afraid of the street. He turned and shouted into it:

"I won't be a doctor!"

He shook his fist into the face of the houses:

"I won't be a doctor!"

Blood rushed to his face. He coughed. Perspiration stood on his forehead. He felt tired, spent. How would he ever get home? The Subway . . . He turned into the station. But the music, although that had been blocks beyond, kept on following him. He muttered.

"That's Rachmaninoff . . . No, it isn't . . . I don't know what it is . . . I don't know one piece from another . . . Why don't I?"

II

"You late again, Manny!"

That was his mother. He didn't answer her. He looked

at the room, at the table with its red tablecloth, now set for the evening meal, at the crayon enlargements of his grandfather and grandmother on the wall. At the ice box in the corner of the dining room. At the long-handled pot in which the soup had been cooked and brought to the table. His father . . . long beard . . . almost asleep . . . Reba—was she dirty or was that just the way she put the rouge on her face? So much rouge! That was his sister.

"Where were you?"

He brushed past his mother. He went into the bedroom. Over his shoulder he told her:

"In school."

"So late? You get out at five, no?"

"Well . . ."

He didn't care to wash up. To hell with hygiene. That was for doctors. He wouldn't be a doctor.

"Ain't coming to eat?" His mother again, in the doorway.

"I don't want to eat. I'm tired." But he went. He sat down at the table. "I'm tired. . . ."

"Ha! You make me giggle." Reba. "What should I say then? You tired? My Gawd, you don't have to stand at the machine all day long, punching them buttons till you think your arm was gonna break off."

"Now you let 'im alone." The mother had come to his defence. Always she came to his defence. "Studying ain't so easy."

"It ain't? Wisht to Gawd you would 'ave let me study. How I was begging you to let me go to business school. All the girls I know is stenogs, only I got to work in a factory, because . . ."

She didn't say it. But she looked at Emmanuel. The accusation was there. He jumped up. He pushed away his plate and jumped up.

"What do you want of me? Did I stop you from school? Am I making you go to work?" Still, he couldn't shake off her eyes. They were telling the truth. His mouth twitched, he lowered his voice: "I guess you're right. If it wasn't for me you'd . . . I'm sorry, Reba!"

She softened, too. She rose and put a hand on his sleeve. She smiled; underneath the thick paint on her face there was something kindly.

"Oh, what's the matter with you, Manny? I was only kiddin'. Can't you take a joke?"

Yes, they were all working for him! His father, getting rheumatism in that basement shop of his, haggling, cheating customers out of an extra potato, cheating for the sake of an added cent. . . . That mother of his, over there. She worked, too. Embroidered with her always diseased eyes. Reba. . . .

"No, I guess you're right, Reba. I . . . I'm just sucking the blood out of you, all of you. . . ."

"Don't be a fool. My work is all right. You'll be a doctor soon."

Ah, he'll be a doctor soon! That's why they were willing to work. He was a bank of flesh, into which they put their greasy pennies. . . . To be returned with interest! What if he told them that he didn't intend to become a doctor? What if he told them to go to hell? How? How to say it to them? After all this?

He ate his fish. There was no talk in the room. His father drank the soup with gurgling noises. It was *borscht* soup. It trickled down over his beard, red soup, and he wiped it away with the back of his hand. His mother sighed every time she had to rise to bring something to the table. His family!

Suddenly Emmanuel rose. The room was choking him. The walls were coming nearer. The clatter of the dishes was low thunder now.

"I'm through."

He knew where he was going. Upstairs, to the third floor, to Etta. Etta! Etta! She was real. She had black hair, and when you touched it you could shut your eyes and think you were touching nice warm water. It seemed to lick your fingers with a warm tongue, her hair. Her eyes, too, like the feel of a child-wind in summer. . . .

"Manny!"

She had come to meet him at the door. Their hands touched. He was the first to draw his away. Again he felt warm all over, as he had in the street. When she brushed past him in the dim-lit hall to lead the way to the living room and her body was close to his, Emmanuel was conscious of a feeling of shame, his throat became dry. For no reason at all, as far as he could tell.

Their living room was like any other East Side living room. No—better. Here there was a cheap golden-oak piano, too, and an incongruous gilded music stand with stencilled flowers and angels and birds. Otherwise the usual crayon pictures of bearded ancestors of *scheiteled* ancestors, the seven-branched candlestick on the mantel, the rocking chair, a vase with artificial roses. . . .

"Listen, Manny, you never heard me sing, did you? I'm gonna sing a new piece I just got. Wanna hear it?"

She seated herself at the piano. She spread the sheets of music. The song was a ballad, a jumble of molasses-coated words, smirking though they meant to whimper. And her hands struck the wrong notes, they slipped off, she had to shake her head and begin all over again. Her voice uncertain, trembling. Still . . . Emmanuel, listening to the girl, knew that this was the street returned. His mouth opened in amazement. His arm shook. Then:

"Etta!" he cried, cutting into the cracked notes of the piano. "You can sing!"

She didn't seem to pay any attention to that. Again she started, false, tremulous. Emmanuel grasped her arm.

"Ouch, you're hurting me!"

But he would not let her go on.

"Listen, Etta! You can sing. Don't you understand me? You've got it in you. You . . . well, you can sing, Etta! Not yet. You know what I mean. Not yet. But it's in you. You can sing."

"Yeah?" She was pleased. She brought her face closer to his as he stood there, bending over her.

"You're going to study . . ."

"How can I? I got to go to work. I ain't got time. You feel awful tired after taking dictation all day."

He waved that aside. Again his hand was cutting into her arm.

"You'll have to study. You don't know how good it is. If only I could have studied!"

"Well, you're studying, ain't you? You're gonna be a doctor."

"That's not what I mean . . ."

"How to explain it? Listen, Etta, I wanted to study things like history. Not the stuff they gave me at high school. Real history. There

is colour in it. The books never speak of that, though. They give you only dates and names. But when you shut your eyes you can see helmets and campfires. Flames and singing people in forests, monks in black hoods, golden coins. That's funny how those golden coins come to you when you shut your eyes. That . . . That's history."

"Oh, I don't know. I never cared much for it in school."

"Because you never shut your eyes to see. Then, take drawing. The way I imagine it. . . . Well, I wasn't good at it, of course. My lines took crazy turns. They moved about the paper and I couldn't stop them. The teacher was angry. But what could I do? He put there a vase and a strawberry box and I could see only patches of colour and sometimes fountains and sometimes dancing flowers. You know. . . . The lines went their own way. Sometimes one side was larger than the other, sometimes you could see through it. . . . And my teacher was angry."

"I don't understand you. What you mean flowers was dancing?" She reached out for his hand and patted it. "You say such funny things, Manny. What you shouting for so?"

He felt her face very close to his. Her hair touched his eyes. He brushed that aside. He spoke in whispers now.

"Listen, Etta, I'll teach you how to sing. I'll teach you. I can do it. I can't sing myself, but I can teach you. It's here in me! Shall I?"

She didn't seem to care about that. She was flushed, her eyes had grown wide, warm. Her red bit of a tongue moistened her quivering lips:

"Yeah!" Hers was also a whisper. Then her arms were about his neck.

Feeling the touch of her bare elbows, Emmanuel stopped talking. The arms were hot. Through her thin blouse he could see the girl's shoulders. Suddenly he bent his face to hers, almost bit into her lips. He was happy. No, not the melody of the street . . . that was gone just now. . . . This was something else. His legs trembled.

"Etta, I love you!"

She lay back in his arms. She knew. She kissed him with even more passion than before. He was going to be a doctor. . . .

"We're sweethearts, ain't we, Manny?"

"Yes, yes!" Ah, it was good to kiss her.

"We're gonna go steady, yeah?" He would be a doctor. They would go "steady." Then there would be a "catered supper" in the pink reception room of an East Side hall after the wedding, with many candles in the hands of the guests, a band for dancing, a paper-flower decorated throne for the bridal pair. "Steady, yes, Manny?"

There was only another year of college. . . .

III

Another year of college.

That was the hardest year. Emmanuel told himself every day that it would have to be the last—another seven hours in the classrooms would kill him. No, not kill him, make him do something, murder, suicide, what did he know? What if he kicked over an apparatus in the laboratory, what if he spat into the dean's august, bearded face? They'd throw him out then. . . . Histology, materia medica, physiological chemistry, the rotten, dead stuff . . . all the rotten, dead stuff. . . . And then there would have to be an added year, in a hospital. He, Emmanuel Wolkowitz, an interne. He, Emmanuel Wolkowitz, taking thermometers out of the mouths of patients, making clinical charts, listening to the smutty confidences of leering nurses. . . .

He tried to go through that year, somehow. The street was still there, but since that evening many months ago when he had turned to defy it, he was no longer afraid of it. He was doing something which, he knew, the street must approve of.

He was doing something! He was writing. Writing was easy. Except when the words would not come. Or the wrong ones came. The dictionary was stupid. Dots and dashes and exclamation marks were stupid. They ruined the melody. Who said writing was easy, anyhow? What about the song? It would go on in your head, in your ears, it would paint pictures: dreamfields of the dawn, grottoes where purple and blue flowers sang. When you tried to put all that to paper there were only words and the song was gone. Words were harsh—you couldn't write down the melody. . . . But he wrote.

He said to Etta:

"I'll be a writer!"

"Gowan! Not a doctor?" She didn't believe what he said, of course. She thought it a good joke. "That ain't a good trade."

A trade!

"Oh, yes, it's very good when it's a trade," he replied. "Mine will be art." He wanted to take back the words immediately. Art! He! When the melody could not be captured. Uncertainly: "Well, of course, it's not very profitable."

"Then you can't be a writer," decided Etta, "because you'll have to earn money. Sure!"

"Oh, money!" Emmanuel looked at his shiny trousers. "Money!"

"Now, Manny, get all that foolishness out of your head. You're gonna be through school in no time now and then we'll get married. My father will furnish an office for you and . . ."

Yes, he knew that. Her father would furnish an office for him. All East Side fathers did. He had seen it happen again and again. To some of his classmates, too. An office—then he'd have to practise. Marry Etta, practise, make money for her, for his family, for Reba's dowry, who would in turn be sold to somebody else, a lawyer or dentist perhaps. Was there no way out of it?

There must be! He would be a writer. An author. After all, there must be money in it. So many magazines. And then, perhaps, he would write a book. Would Etta, would his family care how the money came, as long as he gave them enough? He saw his name on a dull-red volume. In golden letters: Emmanuel Wolkowitz.

But why did they want money so much?

"Why do you want money so much, Etta?"

"Well, my Gawd, who don't? This ain't living, the way we go on now. Maybe once a week you take me to the movies. Oh, I ain't complaining, Manny. Only it's pretty hard. All the other girls at the office have good times. They go to Coney Island, Broadway, they go to cabarets, dances. I'm as good-looking as they are. I got nice clothes. You're all right, Manny, but gee, it's long, waiting like this."

"Oh . . ."

"You ain't sore at me, are you, because I told you? It'll be all right, Manny! You'll make good. I'll speak to my father. He'll come across."

"Oh. . . ."

He didn't go near her for the next three or four days.

* * *

There were two letters on the dining-room table. One had come in a large, oblong manila envelope, the other in a cheap pink one.

Emmanuel had just come home from college. He picked up the letters. He saw that his mother had opened them. Now, as he came into the room, her diseased eyes narrowed:

"That's why we go hungry an education to give you? That's why?"

He coloured. Angrily.

"You shouldn't have opened them. You had no business to."

"What? My own children's letters I shouldn't open, maybe?"

Anyway, she couldn't have read them. She couldn't read English. One of the things was a returned manuscript, the other a letter from Etta. . . . Still, his mother must have guessed, because now she turned on him:

"Goils! To spend money on. And this craziness, this story business."

Pale, he threw at her:

"I've got to write if I want to be a writer!"

Her face hardened. She shook her bony, needle-scarred finger in his face:

"A writer he wants to be, with the family starving." She wiped her nose, her eyes. "A doctor he don't want to be, what's a profession. A writer, even if maybe we die and your sister Reba got to break her arms pushing that machine."

Out in the kitchen he read Etta's letter. She had spoken to her parents, she wrote—Emmanuel had left that to her because he didn't have the courage, he didn't care enough—and her father had expressed willingness to furnish an office for him after the marriage. "Gee, I'm just tickled silly, are you glad, honey?" was her question in the even, character-

less business-college handwriting. "I just couldn't wait until I see you, so I had to write."

"So that's it," he thought. His mouth moved: "Glad . . ."

His mother was standing next to him again.

"Goils! I'm going blind with embroidery and your father any minute is gonna kill himself with that rheumatism yet. All our lives, all our lives for you we worked."

Oh, yes, all their lives. Putting pennies into him, putting food into him, waiting, waiting. . . .

"It's all right, Ma, I . . ."

"My eyes feel like they was on fire . . ."

"It's all right, Ma. Listen!" He read her the letter. "You see, Etta's father is going to furnish an office for me. You see . . ."

"Manny! Oh, my good God, honest? Honest, Manny? My Manny, my good son, what's going to be a doctor, what's going to be so good to his family!"

She kissed him. She pawed over his face, his hair. He suffered that. Writing? Well. . . . Where was the street? Well. . . . He'd be a doctor . . . Etta, his father, his mother, Reba. . . .

"Sure, Ma."

IV

Emmanuel watched the patient go out of his office. He hadn't been able to do anything for the girl. He hadn't dared to do anything for her. In fact, he had shaken his head even before hearing her request. Her eyes had told him. Sorry for the girl? Yes. Of course he was sorry for her. But it wasn't ethical. . . . He had to laugh at the word. Ethics—smug euphemism. Simply afraid, that was the truth. Couldn't risk it. He, the well-known physician, member of medical associations, "a respected member of the community."

Seven years ago, perhaps, when money had been needed. When impatient eyes were watching him. Four pairs of eyes—no, six, because there had been Etta's family, too. Now there was enough money. Now there was his office. The mahogany desk with its impressive medical volumes, the white enamel instrument cabinet. An X-ray apparatus.

The elaborate washstand with its gleaming appointments. The blue-lettered sign on the window: E. Manfred Woll, M.D.

"That's not I, of course," he told himself.

E. Manfred Woll. . . . Etta's doing.

"You can't have a kike name in a swell neighbourhood like this," she had told him.

All right, the physician, *medicinæ doctor*, that was E. Manfred Woll. But then where was Emmanuel Wolkowitz? He didn't know.

There used to be a street. That wasn't any more. Upstairs there was only his apartment, with every piece of correct furniture just so, with every proper picture just so, every cushion rigid, every piece of china, every vase as the interior decorator had planned it. He was living in an interior decorator's apartment! Etta's doing.

Etta herself, his wife, composed of a pretty face, a carefully, painfully, pretty face, of just so much obedient, matter-of-fact sex, so much wifely devotion, solicitude:

"Dearie, you're so tired!" Every day. . . . "Here, let me get the girl to make you a nice hot cup of tea."

There used to be a melody. . . . In the beginning he had attempted to get Etta to sing. She had replied:

"Oh, I don't know! Too much trouble. Lessons and everything. Of course, if I was a single girl it would be nice to learn and get a job in a show or in vaudeville. But ain't I got the best husband in the world to take care of me now?"

Well, she didn't understand! Emmanuel watched the things in the office, he watched himself seated at the desk of E. Manfred Woll, M.D. Funny, that was!

Etta came in. As usual:

"Am I disturbing you, dear?"

He didn't reply. She would come in, anyway. She seated herself on the edge of his desk, her pretty legs two silken flashes as they rocked. She toyed with his paper knife, the self-consciously ornamental onyx knife, her gift.

"That car salesman is going to come around to-morrow. What shall I tell him?"

"The salesman. I don't know! What do you want to tell him?"

Etta pouted. In spite of the usual smile she had so care-

fully cultivated during the last seven years, her eyes were cold.

"It isn't what *I* want to tell him. You know that. I'm not the one for whose sake we're getting that limousine. But you can't be driving around in that dingy sedan. You ought to have a real car. People expect it of you."

Always that argument. The apartment people expected of him, her dresses people expected of him, his name people expected of him. Nothing for her. Everything for him. Oh, a good wife!

"You expect it of me, too, don't you, Etta?"

"Well . . ."

"You all expect it of me? Your father expected an interest on his money: a nice home for you, nice clothes for you. He got it. My family. . . . Well, they're well off now, they've no troubles. A nice home in the Bronx. Reba got her dowry, she got her lawyer. . . . Aren't you, all of you, satisfied yet? What else do you want?"

"Manny, I don't understand you."

"No!"

"What is the matter with you to-day?"

To-day. . . . Seven years, nine, twelve . . .

"Etta, what would you say if I told you I'm through?"

"What do you mean, 'through'?"

"That I'm going away?"

"Where are you going?"

He couldn't answer that. Where would he be going? To the street? The street . . .

Etta had left him, shrugging her shoulders. She didn't bother to try to understand him. One of his unaccountable fits! Alone, Emmanuel continued sitting at his desk. Would he really go away?

The telephone rang. He recognized the voice. His uncle. For years the "support of the family," who had helped him through college, helped his father with the basement penny business. A self-satisfied, ruthless, self-made man, narrow, full of many hatreds. A charitable, religious Jew, a good father. Cloaks and suits.

"Manny, my son Dewey is gonna have for him a graduation party from high school. I want you positively to come."

Emmanuel promised. He liked Dewey, a boy who was

forced to be bright, who was forced to be the best student in his class, Dewey, who had once received a beating in his presence for daring to read a novel on a Saturday instead of going to the synagogue. Was Dewey perhaps like himself?

Emmanuel walked out of the house. At the door his chauffeur asked:

"Shall I get the car, sir?"

"No, I'll walk."

The man touched his cap, looked after Emmanuel stupidly. It was raining. Emmanuel didn't care. The rain would do him good to-day, he thought. It would be good to walk into the street while it was raining. Already the afternoon, dusk-cloaked, was slipping away and in the coming darkness the pavement of the street would reflect the light from the windows. Yellow pools of light. . . . It would be a long walk. The street was far away.

Too far away. After some five blocks Emmanuel stopped. Could that distance to the street be covered to-day? Could it be covered in a year, in a lifetime? Perhaps it wasn't there at all. There was no melody now—perhaps there never had been a melody. . . .

And did it matter now? He was a doctor. Could he tell that to the street? Could he tell about his family, about Etta?

Was there nothing else than to go back home? That he couldn't answer. After all the years, that distant street was still calling Emmanuel. Maybe. . . . Even if there should be no melody, one could go on toward the street. But—home? He walked on.

Then he remembered. Wasn't there something he had intended to do on the way? What? Oh, Dewey. . . . The graduation party would be a grand affair. He wouldn't go, of course, but a gift would be expected. A set of books?

A set of books for Dewey? Who was so much like himself? Books? Dewey was like himself! But then. . . .

"They were my tools," the thought came to him. "I couldn't use them. They weren't the right tools. . . . Yes, they were. . . . Those others weren't right. . . . The ones at college. Now they're at home. Etta's? She can have them. Let her have them. Wrong tools, all of them wrong tools. . . . The others, too. . . . All

the books I've ever had!" And then the zig-zag pattern:
"Tools, books, tools, tools. . . ."

He entered a shop. No books. . . . He pointed to a table. To the clerk he muttered:

"These. . . ."

He gave Dewey's name, the address. He stood there, watching the large package being wrapped up. He nodded:

"That's right. . . ."

A set of carpenter's tools. A hammer, a saw, a plane.

Out of the shop. He went on. How far the street was! No—there it was, approaching him, coming toward him. There, that was the street. He stopped for a breath. These were the stones . . . his feet were touching the pavement. . . . And the street was dark. But this end had always been dark, he remembered. Emmanuel lifted his head, his eyes searched the darkness. Nothing yet. But he knew. The yellow pools would be farther on, much farther on. . . .

THE WAGER

By ISA URQUHART GLENN

From Argosy-All Story

KIRWIN, you'll find rain in hell as soon as you will a straight girl in a dance hall in Manila! Don't wax sentimental over a pretty blonde, out here, until you know the circumstances which landed the lady among the half-breeds. I'll wager that girl is as tough as they make 'em in even this off country."

This from young Angier.

"I'll take you! There's something in her face that one can tie to. Call her over, at the end of this dance, and let's settle it. Long wait ahead of us, anyway, until Mayhew shows up. He won't be in a hurry, with this deluge. Been roughing it sufficiently; he'll be taking it easy while he is in town." Kirwin's older and somewhat graver face was turned toward the dancing couples. He stared at them from underneath beetling brows, dispassionately appraising the girl whom they were discussing.

"Ever find out why Mayhew is in the islands?" asked Angier idly. "Secretive cuss! Acts like a Secret Service bird—prowling around unlikely places, such as this joint in which he arranged to meet us to-night."

"Job brought him. That's straight enough. But I see what you mean. He does seem to be looking for something outside the job. Now, as to that bet——"

Seriously they arranged the terms of the wager. In the byways of the world, trifles are serious when big things are not happening.

"Two to one——"

It was young Angier who plunged the deepest. He was at the age when a man is sure that he knows the woman game.

"It will be the same old tale," he said. "Men! One man; then two men; then a few more—and the streets."

It rained—as if a gigantic bucket of water were being emptied from the clouds that lowered over the city.

Manila, like all ladies, has moods; and when she weeps it means trouble. Her rainy mood is sinister—reminiscent of untold horrors. The Moat, evil in even its modernized form, seems, when bespattered by the raindrops that turn oily as they strike, to be hiding dark secrets of a past age. Over the wet and slippery Bridge of Spain many men have gone to their ruin; through the Puerta Isabella Dos many women have reached the bottom. Manila blinks through the downpour, knowing full well that men are strong, and men are weak, but no man can be both. And well does Manila know that few women in her clutches have achieved the first.

The tin roof reverberated under the bombardment of the rain. The wind hit the building, which vibrated. A breath of damp, cool air blew in to the crowded dance hall. The dancers paused, for an instant taken aback by the fury of the storm. They felt the insecurity of the human being in the face of the elements. The clamour of the trap drum was unaccompanied by the sliding sound of feet; even the feet faltered. The wind died down as suddenly as it had arisen. The music of the Filipino jazz band broke forth with renewed vigour. The dancers again set out upon the vast floor, moving along in the fox trot as interpreted by the two hemispheres.

At a table near the dancing floor sat the two officers who had made the bet. They waited for their white uniforms to dry out from the storm that had caught them unprepared. Amusement showed in their sunburnt faces as they watched the many odd variations of the great American dance. The dancers circled past their table, the mestizos throwing out their feet with waving motions inherited from the Spanish habanera, the full-blood natives flopping carelessly along in heelless chinelas which necessitated exaggerated glides, the Chinamen shuffling. Dancing with these assorted breeds were girls as unmistakably Caucasian as their partners were Oriental. These girls clung precariously to the loose sleeves of the Chinaman, the unconfined shirt tails of the Filipino, the starched coat of the mestizo. The painted faces looked

up at the yellow, brown, and bistre skins of their partners. White teeth gleamed from the men's open mouths; gold fillings flashed between the dangerously smiling lips of the girls.

Angier grinned.

"Watch your pure and very blonde lady leering up at that greasy old chino! Young for it, too. Now you, Kirwin—you never believe wrong of a pretty woman, though you agree about the shortcomings of the ugly ones. But you are wrong, old top! Sin overtakes the fair, not the unlovely. Look at that girl's dress. Disreputable! What decent woman would show all of her naked shoulders and most of her back to this crowd? Do you suppose that the chino dancing with her thinks she is decent? Not on your life he doesn't! His decent women swathe themselves in stiff brocades and padded coats."

"So do his indecent ones. Stick to facts."

They ordered another round of the sickeningly sweet and depressingly lukewarm soft drinks of a reformed Manila. The straws wilted as soon as touched, and fell over the sides of the tall glasses in the manner of Victorian heroines who swoon.

The music stopped. The dancers separated, going to the different tables.

Pink and shabby, tawdry skirts; very lovely hair in long and thick curls down her back and hanging in her eyes—that variety of soft blue eye which, when angry, suggests steel heated to the white pitch, but which crinkles engagingly when merry; face hard and sophisticated—the dancer of the wager!

Easy to induce her to sit down at their table; impossible to persuade her to take a drink from the flasks with which they were armed against contingencies. She insisted on soda water—and then more soda water.

"I want something sweet and cold," she told them. "God—how I've missed it! I hate places where there's not enough ice for ice cream."

Before the soda water arrived the music started again. Kirwin half rose from his chair and bowed ceremoniously to the girl. "Will you give me the pleasure of this dance?"

"Gee!" exclaimed the young person. "And the soda water on the way!"

"I thought you'd like it," muttered the man.

"Like it? Like to dance?" She broke into laughter. "Say—don't you know yet that a person's job is never fun? It's bread and butter for me to move my feet, not pleasure."

She seized the glass of purplish mixture that was being placed before her and plunged the spoon, and after that her nose, into its enticing depths.

"Now, this is real joy!" she announced.

"Where you living?" Angier was already at the business of winning his bet.

The girl turned on him a cold and wary look that, as she studied his frank boyish face, softened into good fellowship.

"Over in the Tondo—a Ford-sized life in a Ford-sized room. I take my shower under an oil can, and that after I've gone out and fetched in the water that's in the can. And if the water runs out before the soap's off, I've got to hustle into my kimono and get some more to fill up the darned can—and then jump under it like the house was on fire, so's the water won't give out again. That's comfort for you! And me used to Broadway! I tell you—give me Broadway, with the human toads staring at you! Out here, there's nothing to stare at you except half-breed frogs. I'm not strong for half-breeds. That's the reason I came over here when you called me—because you fellows are white." She gave them another of her wary looks; prepared for their unbelief.

"What's your name, kid?"

"Miss Casey—to you!" replied the girl promptly, and with emphasis on the title.

"What's your name to the chinos?" asked the amused Angier.

The girl's face turned a dark and painful red. She glanced helplessly at the man whose manner toward her was marked by a difference.

Kirwin smiled kindly in response to this glance.

"That's enough, Angier," he said with some sternness in his voice. "Miss Casey, my friend is distinctly young and rather flippant; take him with a grain of salt."

"Sure!" responded Miss Casey. "I've often met 'em like that. They're harmless."

Angier lifted his glass to his merry young mouth. From the

glass issued a gurgle or two. Miss Casey eyed him for a moment; then turned to Kirwin with a degree of confidence.

"Say—what did you two fellows call me over here for? I know it wasn't just to have a good time. You can't fool Mary. I know the difference in men. He's guying me, but he isn't tough."

Kirwin bowed, growing respect in his deep-set eyes.

"Miss Casey, we owe you an apology. We did an unpardonable thing; we made a bet on you. It isn't what men should do about a woman——"

" . . . But you did it about me, because I'm not a woman—I'm just a dance-hall girl in the Orient? Oh, don't apologize; I understand. I'm used to it."

There was no longer a trace of the ironic in Kirwin's deference. Something of old-fashioned ceremony crept into his manner and softened the girl. She smiled at him without rancour.

"Don't say a word," she said kindly, with the obvious intent of putting him at his ease. "You haven't hurt my feelings a bit. I know when to get mad; and I know when not to. I don't think either of you meant a thing. And it's a comfort to be sitting here with two men from home. Forget it!"

Angier withdrew his face from the tall glass. He put his hand on the roughened hand of the girl as it rested on the table beside her soda water.

"I'm sorry," he said. "And I want to ask you something quite aside from the bet. We're all Americans, as you said. Is there anything that we could do for you?"

Mary Casey put her other hand on top of his and pressed it. For a moment there was a mist over her blue eyes.

"You're a nice boy. Much obliged. But there isn't anything. I'm taking care of myself; and I can pay my rent, and pick up my meals one way or another. And not from men!" The guarded look was again in evidence as she said this. Then she laughed. "You see how mean I am, about suspecting men! But I have to be that way. There aren't too many you can trust."

To the jerky strains of Manila's latest jazz—a tune already, in America, a year old and buried—she leaned across the rickety table and looked from one to the other of the men.

It was a direct, level look.

"What was the bet?"

"Oh, I say! Miss Casey!" began Angier uncomfortably. "See here: I've already said I was sorry I'd made it." He took out his cigarette case. He struck a match. There was a tinge of nervousness in his manner.

Mary extended her hand for a cigarette.

"Might as well have one," she said; "though it does register guilt, in the movies, for a woman to smoke!" She leaned back in her cane chair and absently watched the thin blue vapour that curled up from her nose. Her rouged lips were parted in a rather hard smile. "Never occurred to you, did it, that women could stay straight easier if you men weren't so keen on saying we were crooked? Of course I can guess what the bet was! And I can very nearly guess which of you it was who bet for me. And—on account of one of you having taken a chance on me—I may tell you a thing or two before the evening is over. I'd somehow like a man who had the nerve to take a chance like that—on my side—to win his bet!"

The muchacho approached the table for orders. He bowed obsequiously to the two officers and brushed his arm contemptuously across the shoulder of Mary Casey. He drew back suddenly, rubbing his cheek. Miss Casey's hand had administered a smart slap on that yellow expanse. She glanced apologetically at the two Americans.

"It's the only way to treat 'em," she informed them. "Treat 'em rough, and in a hurry! That's my way, and it works. If you don't know the game, this is no place for you."

She looked out over the floor. A stout and perspiring mestizo, with the unmistakable Chinese look, was approaching.

"I must dance with this bum. He's one of the 'influential patrons,' and the management would have a fit and bounce me if I turned him down. I'll be back after he's walked a mile on my feet."

The two men watched her as she steered the lumbering mestizo through the crowd. Neither of them spoke.

At the end of the dance she returned to the table and sat down as a matter of course. This was the Orient, and a long way from home and its standards of caste. And these Americans had been decent to her—kind to her.

"Ain't it fierce, to have to dance with a man that's a hop toad and an elephant all in one?" she inquired with a passing annoyance.

"Know the game? Sure I know the game—and a darned good thing I do!" she continued, taking up the conversation where they had left it. "I've known it since I was a kid. I'm twenty-three now; and I've been thanking my stars all that time that I knew it. You put yourself through the China Coast, and you need to know the ropes of life. You think I'd want to be one of those sweet, innocent dunces that you men always like to believe we blondes are—and that we aren't, so many times? I'd have fallen into the paws of a Chink—I would! Innocent sweetness can't come through the China Coast whole, and don't you forget it! I've walked straight, but it wasn't by being sweet and innocent that I did it. It was by knowing every devilment that men can be up to. They are all alike—the men I meet. Their skins are different colours, but their ideas are the same. All yellow inside, and black and brown and white outside."

Musingly, she sipped her soda water. In this repose her mouth showed hard lines in crescents at the corners. There were wrinkles raying out from her eyes—baby eyes, at times. These eyes now turned contritely to the two officers.

"That was hitting below the belt, wasn't it? My turn to apologize now! But it isn't often I meet fellows like you—fellows who'll talk to me instead of wanting to paw me—guys who are drunk, and——" Her voice trailed off. She stared unseeingly at the crowd as it pranced past the table. "God! I don't blame men for the way things are with us girls! If I was a man I'd play the game that way, too, I guess. They haven't got a thing staked on the turn of the wheel. But we've got everything to lose. And if we aren't careful we lose it; that's all."

The wind came up again and tore at the house, and around the house, with concentrated enmity. It played with the loose shell windows as the cat with the mouse. Inspired by this lack of control in the elements, Kirwin became elemental in his questioning of the girl.

"Born and brought up in New York, on Eighth Avenue, you say? Then why out here?"

"What's a girl who's poor to do to feed herself? Not but what the men 'll feed her—if she's a fool! A man goes and marries, and gets a girl baby. And does he have that girl baby taught a trade when she leaves grammar school, like he does his sons? He does, like hell! He throws her out—in front of men—to catch a husband! 'Tisn't fair to the girls. Look at me: I didn't know how to do a thing except dance. I'd learned how to do that on the sidewalks, to hurdy-gurdies."

The noise of the rain on the roof deadened her voice, so that the men had to lean across the table in order to hear her next words.

"I said I'd tell you a few things. All right! I will! It may help you in your bets on other women."

Her voice became shriller, more filled with excitement. The rain no longer deadened it; it was charged with an electricity that carried it above the storm.

"When I knew that if I didn't want to marry one of the poor sims I met—with his hair slicked down with grease till it looked like shiny black shoes—I'd have to scratch for my living, I got busy and hunted a job in a cheap dance hall in that part of town. My job was to dance with any dirty, smelly man who came in and hadn't got a girl along. Not much of a trade, but it was a long sight better than the one my sister took up—on the streets! That was another trade you didn't have to be trained for!

"'Mary, be careful!' my mother kept telling me. 'A girl has got to be careful—because the men won't be careful for her.'"

"By the time I'd learned the game of taking care of myself, I'd worked up to a sweller dance hall on Broadway. The fellows who came in there were clean, except in their minds. But I kept saying to myself: 'Mary, be careful!'"

"And then, one evening, in came a seedy-looking man who made you think he'd seen better times and a fatter living. Always shaved clean, and smelled of talcum powder. But his clothes were brushed until there wasn't a bit of nap left on them, I used to think when I was dancing with him and looking at his shoulder. He was an actor, out of a job, he told me. They tell you the story of their lives when they're dancing with you.

"Once he came in downright hungry. I shared with him that night the dinner the management gave me.

"I got in the habit of looking for him, and sharing my dinner with him. I respected myself a lot because I was giving him dinner instead of him feeding me. Silly, wasn't it?" She looked at Kirwin.

Kirwin nodded gravely. "I understand that perfectly," he said. "You would feel that way. So should I, in your place."

"Thanks!" said Mary Casey. "Well—you know—after you've fed a man when he's hungry, you get to sort of think you own him. You feel like you're his mother, you might say. I got to feeling that way about Teddy. I felt like he was mine. I don't suppose I thought about marrying; I knew he couldn't support me. But I never thought about anything that I'd be doing, way off in life, when we were older, without thinking about him being right there with me. You know what I mean? I just didn't think we'd ever be anywhere without the other one being there, too. Not that he said anything much, only—'I'm awful fond of you, kid!' But I didn't mind. I was fool happy, dancing afternoons with all sorts of men, and all the time thinking that pretty soon Teddy'd be coming in by the doorkeeper, and looking around for me—and then sit in the darkish restaurant eating part of my dinner—though it did used to leave me pretty hungry, for the dinner the management gave us wasn't much on size. Some of the girls used to kick about those dinners; you're awful hungry after you've been dragged around the floor for hours and hours by heavy-footed hicks. But the management laughed at the complaints; said the girls would keep their figures if they didn't eat too much. I'll say I kept mine! I was 'most starved every night when I got to bed. My stomach used to feel as if it was sticking to my backbone. I was on the floor every dance. I was popular with the men who came there. It isn't that I'm pretty; I'm not. And so they look again to see what the deuce I am. And that gets a man's goat—when he can't make out what he likes about a girl.

"Anyhow, if I'd ever been pretty I'd have lost it by now. I've been so darned careful; and when a girl's careful, and suspects everybody, she gets hard and mean looking. The

other girls—those that aren't careful—get hard and tough. It all comes to the same thing; they look the same way in the face. Women can't look soft in the face unless they're taken care of by their people."

"When you are talking this way, you don't look hard," interrupted Kirwin.

"That's because it's a comfort to sit here and say everything that comes into my head. Most times, when I'm across a table from a man, I have to think before I open my mouth: 'Will this give him a handle?' And so I just say: 'Oh! Isn't this a lovely floor?' And: 'My! But you are a dandy dancer!' When like as not he's stepped all over me."

"Men are brutes! They even step on the ladies' toes!" the laughing Angier remarked.

"They step on more than their toes," the girl countered. "They step on anything the girl gives them a chance to step on! At least, most of them do. I never saw but one who wouldn't. And I lost him—lost sight of him, I mean—on account of losing his card." She lifted her long and thick lashes of a golden brown that caught the light from the swinging oil lamps and formed a delicate nimbus around her serious eyes. "But I'm going to tell you about him. I'd like you to know I've met one man I could respect. Men who hang around dance halls not even a boob could think much of!

"It was this way:

"Times got worse. I got so I couldn't make out. They raised my rent on me. I couldn't go to live with my people. They bunked and washed and cooked in one room, with a window and the fire escape for their excitement; and I'd got used to better. I couldn't go back there—not with Teddy in my head. He'd have looked down on me, see?

"So Teddy says to me: 'Why don't you try South America? I've been told they pay high, down there, for American dancers. And board and lodging thrown in,' he says. And he says that he'll see if he can get me a chance, through a friend of his that's in town looking for girls to go down to Colon. This friend came in to talk to me about it. It's a swell chance to make big money, he says. The Panamanians are ready spenders, he says, and crazy over dancing. And Teddy kept trying to make me go.

"I went. The boat got in about seven o'clock in the evening. The man they sent to meet me said that I was to hop into my dance clothes and hurry along with him to the hall. My trunk would go up afterward.

"Say, I'm telling you—I never did see a dance hall like that one! It was a scream! The guy hadn't told me that the Panamanians were all colours! Everything was sitting at the tables, from putty-coloured dudes with diamonds in their embroidered shirts to jet-black niggers in fine clothes. Each man had poured a bottle of scent over himself. The smell of that perfume, and the smell of the different breeds of people, all hot and perspiring, was something fierce. It made me feel queer, all of a sudden.

"I sat down at one of the tables, and the fat, cream-coloured woman who ran the place came over and gave me something to drink, to cool me off, she said. It made me cool, but odd feeling. I leaned my head on my hand, so's the floor would stop going around. And something—the heat, maybe—made me so sleepy I thought to myself I'd swap my job for a bed, if I could of found a bed. And then I realized that somebody was stroking my arm; long, pressing strokes like you give a cat's back. There wasn't much feeling in my arm, it was sorter dead; but I knew darned well that somebody was fooling with it. I opened my eyes wide. It was a coon who was fooling with my arm! A real coon, like we have at home—only this one spoke a lingo that I guess was Spanish. Any rate, I didn't understand a word he said. And I jumped away from him; I never had had a coon stroke my arm, and I didn't like it a bit. So I says to him: 'You get away from me!' But he laughed so all his teeth showed; and he reached over and grabbed me. That waked me up sure enough; and I kicked and screamed. And the next thing I knew a white man had come across the room and lifted that coon by the scruff of his neck and thrown him in a corner. I've seen fights in my day—but say! I never saw a prettier one than that! The white man cleaned out the crowd!

"The cream-coloured woman rushed over and began jabbering at him; and the dudes with the diamond buttons stood close by and laughed and whispered to each other in their crazy talk, and pushed their shoulders up in the air until you couldn't see their big ears; but that American paid no atten-

tion to them. He treated them so like scum that I was proud to be standing by him.

"The American took me by the arm—not spoony; just sort of as if he was boss around those diggings—and walked me over to a table in a far corner, away from the jabbering dudes. We sat down. I was sorter nervous by that time. There was something I didn't get, if you know what I mean? So that man tells me:

"'This is no place for an American girl! How'd you come here?'

"I told him all about the contract I'd signed to dance there. And I told him about Teddy, and everything else I could think of. He was a comfort in the midst of all those funny people. He didn't smell of perfume, and he had on plain white clothes, and they were clean around the collar and cuffs. Different, that's all. While I was talking, he sat there looking at me with his eyes half shut, like he was sizing me up. And every now and then he'd nod his head. Once I heard him muttering something about: 'My first assay would be—pure gold!' And I got scared; I thought that he was crazy, too. But when he saw how I was getting as far away in my chair as I could, he laughed—first time he'd laughed. And I noticed that his nose stayed quiet while he was laughing, instead of working up and down like the dagos' noses did. And his eyes laughed; and the dagos' eyes don't laugh. That made me trust him.

"He told me that he was a mining engineer, down there on a job for a Denver crowd.

"'Miss Casey,' the engineer fellow said then, 'I'm not going to leave you here! Do you know what sort of place you're in?'

"I told him all over again about the contract to dance. He frowned, and beat on the table with his forefinger. And when I stopped talking he told me what kind of place it was. I don't suppose I need to tell you?

"I never would have got out of there whole except for that American. I tell you what, I burn candles in the church for that man!

"He explained it all to me; just what business Teddy's friend was up to, shipping girls down to the dance halls in South and Central America. But I didn't like to believe Teddy knew

what that friend of his was wishing on me. The American thought he knew; and he called him an awful word. I felt mad—and sick—and I told him that he was lying about Teddy. But I didn't believe he was lying. And he was awful nice about it; said he didn't blame me for talking up for my friends! But say! What men are friends to girls like me? Never but one man was straight with me—that fellow in Panama!"

The blue eyes were not hard now; neither did they crinkle merrily. Mary Casey's soul looked out of them.

"That engineer fellow was the man I told you I could respect," she stated gravely. "You know what he did for me? He helped me get away from that place! He worked our way through the jabbering crowd until we were near the door; and then, when the music was blaring loud, he threw his coat over my dance dress and grabbed me with his left arm while he pushed off the men who ran in front of us with his right fist. He had a heavy fist—that fellow! I saw one man's nose start bleeding. And a few more were knocked over like ninepins. It only takes one white man to ball out a crowd of niggers and spinnachers.

"‘Sorry for the rough-house, Miss Casey,’ said the engineer fellow, ‘but we have to make our get-away before these nigger police show up.’

"We made it! We ran along the crooked streets that I'd thought were so funny when I drove up from the boat; but they weren't quite as funny when we were running along them in the dark and I was catching my heels in the holes between the big paving blocks that didn't fit even against each other. One of the heels came off, and we didn't have time to go back and pick it up. I hobbled along as well as I could, holding on to the engineer fellow's nice hard arm. I didn't want to fuss when he was being such a good sport.

"All the way down to the docks the engineer fellow was telling me, as well as he could for running and dodging from shadow to shadow of the squatty houses, and looking up and down each street that we had to cross, what I was to do when I got to New Orleans. But I didn't hear a word he said: I was so busy thinking how nice it was to have a man like that taking care of me—and how strong his arm was. If I'd stopped thinking about his arm and thought more about

what he was saying to me, I'd have been better off. But you never are foxy at the time that you ought to be.

"He swung me aboard a ship just as the gangplank was drawn up. All he had time to do was to push a card into my hand.

"'Here's my address,' he said. 'Let me know how you are coming on, and where you are.' And then he said: '*Hasta la mañana!*' which I'd picked up in the dance hall, and knew meant that he was going to see me some time.

"The captain was looking over the rail of the ship. The engineer fellow threw him a little package twisted up in a piece of paper that he tore from a notebook; and he said something to the captain in Spanish.

"So there I was, on a banana ship—in my dance dress and one heel off my slippers, and the engineer fellow's coat over my shoulders! I must have struck that captain dumb! But I didn't care. I was too busy staring at the engineer fellow back there on the dock.

"A puff of wind came up and blew the card that he had given me out of my hand and down into the water. I leaned way over the rail and saw it sucked under by the churning of the machinery. And then I remembered that I hadn't read it. I'd been too busy staring at him to read his note. I ran after the captain and asked him if he knew the name of the fellow. 'No,' he said, 'he'd never seen the chap before.' I took the fellow's coat off and looked through the pockets to see if there wasn't another card in one of them. But there wasn't a thing except some papers scrawled all over with his figuring—his mining work, I guess.

"That's the way I lost out. But I've always kept the coat. It reminds me that I once met a good man.

"When we got to New Orleans with those bananas, I was still a long way from home. And I didn't have a cent of money; my purse was in the trunk that they'd been going to send up to the dance hall at Colon. I said to the captain the day we made port:

"'I don't know how I am to pay you, unless you wait until I get a job in this town.'

"The captain told me that the engineer fellow had paid my passage, and fifty dollars over for me to get a start on—buy some clothes to wear when I was out looking for a job. Tha

was a real man, that fellow! And as I didn't know his name having been such a fool about not reading his card for looking at him, I couldn't hunt him up to pay it back. So I burn candles for him."

Silence—except for the noise of the jazz band and the shuffling feet.

Kirwin broke this silence. He leaned nearer the girl; his voice was very kind as he spoke to her.

"You shouldn't have come out here. No girl should come out here so long as she can make a cent in the States."

"Dance halls in the States are supposed to be respectable. They'll keep girls on that they suspect a lot about; but they bounce her as soon as all the people outside the business know about her. See? Everybody who went to dance halls in New York knew I'd left on that contract; I'd been such a fool I'd told it all around, trusting Teddy and his friend as I did. That closed the doors of every place I tried to get an engagement. I've chased half way round the world, now, trying to get to some place where they couldn't find out about it. San Anton—'Frisco—Honolulu—I've tried 'em all. And I've sloped out of all of 'em for the same reason. Running away from the flag, I was, instead of following it like the cocktails did. Somebody'd always show up who was there that night in Colon, or who had heard about it; and nobody believed my tale. I don't blame 'em! I wouldn't have believed it if any girl had tried to pass off on me that she'd been such a fool. Girls like me are supposed to know their way around. But I'd been too smashed on Teddy to see straight. That was my one big mistake: to get soft on him. Girls like me can't afford to care for a man.

"It did me one good turn—that jolt at Colon. It knocked Teddy out of my head. I couldn't help seeing the difference between him and the engineer fellow."

She absently stirred the sediment at the bottom of her glass.

"Listen: now I've told you all this—there's one more thing I want to tell you—I've walked straight, even out here. You believe me?" Her voice was tense.

Kirwin and Angier spoke at once. "Yes!"

"I wish I could see that engineer fellow again, and tell him that, too. He did a lot for me."

The rattle of the trap drum, the bellow of the brasses rose

above the storm that still raged outside. The rain beat on the roof in rivalry with the drum.

"Nice night to be getting back to the Tondo in a shaky carromata!" said Mary Casey. "But it's near closing time. You can tell by the state of the chinks' camisas. When they are soaked through, it's early morning. Chinks don't heat up as soon as other men. Ain't they a sweet lot? And heavy on their feet! Oof!" She lifted one slippered foot and rubbed it tenderly.

A Filipino walked up with mincing gait. He thrust out a dance ticket. With a shrug of her thin shoulders Mary Casey went on the floor and abandoned herself to his arms.

Angier turned a sober face to Kirwin.

"You win!" he said.

Kirwin twisted his wrist around until he could see the face of the watch strapped there.

"No use to wait for Mayhew. It's two o'clock."

He clapped his hands together sharply. He settled their score with the muchacho who came in response to that summons. The two men arose from the table of empty glasses.

Fresh air came in to them as they opened the door. Seeming a part of that fresh air was the tall and lean man whom they encountered on the narrow sidewalk. A man in white linen of unmilitary cut, on his close-cropped head a slouched panama that had seen better days. As the three hailed a passing calesa and took refuge within its cramped depths from the downpour, the man took off the battered panama and carefully drained the water from its brim. The little horse attached to the calesa by casual harness ambled down the street.

Above the sloshing sound made by the little horse's feet as he wandered through the puddles, the tall man lifted up his voice and spoke:

"Hard time getting away from the dames at the hotel," he announced grimly. "Those women would chew over a bit of heaven itself until it was as pallid and unappetizing as an over-masticated piece of bacon! I fled for my life, finally. Healthier down in the bowels of the earth, surrounded by gold that doesn't belong to me, and that I am merely passing on for the chaps who are buying up Masbate."

"Does it never make you want some gold of your own, Mayhew?" inquired the curious Angier. "I'd not be able

to stand the strain of being a mining expert. Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink. That sort of stuff."

"Might if I hadn't been very busy with something else. I've been prospecting for human gold. Struck the vein once, and lost it through a fluke." He turned a rather shamefaced gaze on his friends. "What would you say if I told you that for years I'd been chasing a pipe-dream from pillar to post—always trying to catch up with it and see if I was right in my assay? Taking unlikely jobs which would carry me to unlikely places—never overlooking a dance hall this side of hell—with only one thing tangible enough to prove to me that it wasn't actually a dream—a broken slipper heel that I'd picked up in the street on my way back from—from the vision, you might say!"

"So it's a woman you've been sleuthing, you old son of a gun!" howled gleefully the unobservant Angier.

But Kirwin leaned forward and touched the cochero on the shoulder. "*Mano!*" he commanded. "And hurry that plug along!"

The calesa turned a corner on one of its two inadequate wheels. The three men were thrown against each other.

"What the devil, Kirwin——" began Angier. "Oh, I see!" He whistled softly.

"*Síla!*" Kirwin directed the cochero.

The calesa veered around a curve on its other wheel.

"*Poco más!*"

The calesa came to an abrupt halt in front of the dance hall that they had quitted a short time before. The men of the jazz band were coming out, their swathed instruments under their arms. The proprietor was fitting the key into the lock of the door.

Kirwin leaned from the calesa and looked anxiously up and down the narrow street. A solitary female figure, huddled under a dripping umbrella, was picking its way, with the delicate step of the dancer, between the pools of water that overflowed from the gutter on to the sidewalk.

Kirwin sprang from the calesa. He pulled the astonished Mayhew after him. With one hand on Mayhew's shoulder, he turned him in the direction of the huddled figure under the umbrella.

"Go fit that heel to Cinderella!" he laughed.

CÉLESTINE

BY JAMES HOPPER

From Collier's

IN MARCH the war came much nearer to the town, and an aviation camp was set up just outside, in the wheatfields by the National Road. It took shape, as it were, overnight, as if by some enchantment; Célestine, from the round window of her garret room in the inn, saw the planes alighting like white birds in the rose of the dawn. They came five by five from the east; for two days they remained as they had landed, shelterless and inert, as if worn out. Then heavy trucks came rumbling, threw off bales of canvas and partitions of thin wood, and soon a flying camp stood complete, with its tents and its sheds, its hundreds of busy mechanics.

Many of the white birds seemed wounded. Holes were in the wings, some of the wings trailed. The conductors of those weary dragons were sunken-eyed; their faces tattooed with oil, their hair matted. But a lull had come; somewhere in the hills to the east the new drive at last had been stopped; you could hear at night the soft drumming of the guns. The flying men cleaned up. Primp, in freshly pressed uniforms and shining boots, they strolled about, very young men, slim and elegant, twirling swagger sticks and parading gaiety. Gaiety, although each one of them bore stamped upon his heart, as pure gold is stamped, a small secret figure which stood for a certain day, a certain hour, the end of youth, of joy, of adventure and love. Mostly they passed by the inn, on their way to the brighter cafés at the centre of the town; but some of them stopped at the inn and sat at the tables under the trees. Célestine's heart beat faster when they were there; she watched them as she worked; from a distance, for she did not wait on the tables.

She was not allowed to wait on the tables because she was not pretty.

The mistress of the inn believed in pretty serving maids, and Célestine was not pretty. The thick skin of her face was a mask which let pass not a ray of the iridescences of the soul; before that sad dead face men stood embarrassed or even angry. So she did not wear the white aprons and caps, the lacy waists of the tablemaids, but rough blue garments; and did not flit outside under the trees, but was held to the bedrooms and the kitchen's back regions. She was the drudge; she started with the day. She polished boots, laid fires, carried hot water and trays up countless stairs, made beds, swept rooms, swabbed halls. She carried heavy luggage upstairs and obeyed the rageful tyranny of the bells. Midnight would strike before she threw herself upon her narrow pallet under the eaves.

Every afternoon, from four to six, she took the baby of the mistress of the inn out in its perambulator. This was her recreation and her rest. After the flying field had been established on the National Road, it was there she would go. The place had become the town promenade. Out to it, along the road, especially on Sundays, the inhabitants would go in family groups—in family groups in which there were no men, unless, perhaps, some brittle old grandfather.

Once at the field, they stood about respectfully noting everything avidly and calling one another's attention to what they saw; and small boys, terribly interested in what for several years now had been the male's sole interest, slipping under the ropes, got to where they had no business to be.

Célestine, still more shy than the rest, took her station across the road from the camp and a little to one side. From here she could see across the plains to the hills in the east, and also that part of the flying field from which the planes sprang into the air or hoveringly landed. She sat in the clover; it was peaceful here; the baby slept; her own soul drowsed. An old farmer across the way ploughed slowly behind his one old horse; now and then a lark went high up in the air and sang. It was hard to remember that in the low hills beyond, pretty as opals, red carnage boiled and men died.

From those far hills the planes came winging back late in

the afternoon. Far-fixed eyes of mechanics on the field, a pointing finger here or there, were the first signs to Célestine.

She saw dots, small and incredibly high. They became moths, shining—white—and quick as thunder the fliers were near. They came from great battles, and jousts, and fabulous adventures; and as they neared, with hearts seemingly full of a secret joy at terrible pranks they had played, they gambolled and capered and tumbled along the skies.

Usually they came in by fives, in arrow formation, but there were two that always went paired. Célestine learned to distinguish these two. One was a young Frenchman who, on the ground, wore the dark blue of an Alpine chasseur; but the other, in a drab uniform, was a foreigner. These two homed it later than the others: so late that sometimes Célestine could not wait and had to go away without seeing them. When they alighted, the pilots who had come in ahead, and the mechanics who stayed on the ground, strolled to the two planes; they asked questions and looked amused, and sometimes laughed loudly. One day Célestine heard herself resume to herself in words the effect this daily scene had upon her. "These two are the favourites," she said to herself. "They are the Benjamins of the camp!"

The civilian onlookers, loitering about the camp, called the one in yellow uniform "l'Américain" and credited him with great deeds. "*There's* a rough boy!" they would say. "*There's* one who does tricks in the air!" For him Célestine felt a secret preference. The way he landed delighted her. As his plane, swirling down, touched the earth, he looked, in his leather helmet and armour, like some fabulous knight of the air; but even as his plane still rolled along the ground, he snatched off the leather helmet and became a red-headed boy. He always landed thus. While still rushing along the ground at tremendous speed, he snatched off his helmet and became a boy with carrot-red hair. Then something laughed within Célestine, and a bubble of tenderness burst softly in her heart.

Years ago, when a little girl in her native village in Brittany, she had loved secretly the neighbour's son, whose hair was just like that. Now, whenever the plane landed, she saw her native village; she saw the small port, the stone mole, the painted boat heaving, the blue sea.

Gradually Célestine's life, her drab beastlike life, became lit with a dim radiance as from a shaded lamp; her life centred itself altogether on the flying field. In the morning she kept running to her garret room as she worked; and, if she had any luck, saw the planes depart, five by five, five by five, then two. In the afternoon she was at her post in the clover field across the road from the camp. The farmer ploughed over there, a lark singing over his bent head. Farther, the hills were like opals in the sun. And on the other side of those hills the war was going on. She imagined the two fliers in the sky over there. Holding her eyes shut, she saw them in the great heights, wheeling and circling, falling and rising, in a cloud of enemy planes. She saw them, in manœuvres abrupt as lightning, pierce again and again the hostile envelopment—and planes fell, many, falling slowly, like snow drifting.

Late in the afternoon the two came home. The others came first, by fives, sometimes in quick succession, sometimes with long waits between. Sometimes, instead of five, there were four, the winged squadron was broken and on the field there would be much agitation, runnings to and fro, anxious questionings. But the two for whom Célestine waited usually came last, and came always in joy, tumbling like clowns down the skies. The American struck the earth—fabulous and formidable like a god. He snatched off his helmet—and he was a boy, a laughing red-haired boy. Through Célestine's tired body a dull thud of tenderness went resounding deliciously.

About this time the enemy began to bomb the town at night. When came the first of these air raids Célestine did not know what was happening. She was awakened by a rapping of machine guns, by a boom-rrump, boom-rrump of upward shooting cannon, and, leaning out of her garret window, saw pretty cracklings of light up in the sky, as of many fireflies flashing into life suddenly and then dying. Then came an enormous single explosion, and everything went quiet. Célestine slid out into the black silent streets which were ghostily filling with whispering, shivering people; and following them came to a place, near the railroad track, where a little house had stood which she knew very well. The house was no longer there; where it had stood was only a great black hole.

But next night was worse. As, awakened again by the machine guns, Célestine stood uncertain in the narrow hallway outside of her room, a great explosion pressed both walls against her flanks as if they were going to meet, and another, following still nearer, shook the inn as if it were coming down like a pack of cards. Explosion followed explosion for hours as the malevolent birds buzzed in the dark sky overhead; and when at last they had gone, in the light of dawn Célestine saw that a whole block of houses near by lay ripped open, with red-quilt shreds of pulverized beds waving slowly in the cold morning wind.

The people of the town began to go out into the fields every night. By five every afternoon the iron shutters of all the shops clattered shut simultaneously, and along the streets went processions of women, children, babes, and old men, carrying their blankets out to the fields for the night; by sundown the city was an empty city. Célestine remained in her garret room and, lying on her back in her narrow bed, shook to ecstasies of fear and exulting vision. Lying there, rocked by terrific concussions, the whole world seemingly going to pieces beneath and about her body, small kernel in a cosmic chaos, she looked upward out of her soul into the night's black inverted bowl and saw her champions flying there. In thunder-swift chargings, they darted to and fro among the night-enshrouded invaders. The American led all. For a time she saw him as pilot of a plane; then suddenly the wings attached themselves to his body, and he was an archangel with terrible swift sword; then again he was a boy, a laughing red-headed boy—and her withered heart, compressed layer and layer upon itself, opened out like a flower in the midst of her ignoble terror.

Just as abruptly as the night raiding had begun, it ceased for a time, and one evening the two fliers appeared at the inn and took rooms for the night. They had a ten-days' leave, were going to Paris on the early morning train, and were very gay. Célestine watched them from her work with beating heart as they sat at their table in the court, lingering over their wine; and when finally she understood that they had taken rooms and were to be here for the night, a great excitement possessed her. She ran up to the rooms, although she had made them up early in the day, and made them up all

over again; and when they had retired she stationed herself in the dark hallway, to await a possible call for service, hopeful at once and afraid.

After a while the door opened, light splashed out into the hall, and a voice called.

She rushed to answer it. The young Frenchman stood in the doorway. "*Dis-donc*, Madelon," he said lightly, giving her the name of the song. "*Dis-donc*, Madelon, you know, we are freezing in this big tomb of yours!"

She ran swiftly down the three flights to the cellar, and came back with kindling and paper; she ran down once more and returned with a basket full of small logs. She squatted before the hearth and built up a fire.

She felt, rather than saw, the two armchairs behind her, spread side by side before the hearth as for a vigil of friendship. The young Frenchman was in one; the other was empty. Her heart gave a queer jump as she heard a step approach. It came from the other room, approached, stopped; there was the creak of crushed springs. He was there too, now, the other one, the American, in his big chair. She tried to strike a match, and failed.

The young Frenchman began to twit her amorously. Seen from behind, she was attractive enough, with firm white neck upon which strayed ringlets of her yellow hair. He rose, he stooped, he was near her. "*Allons*, Madelon, my lass—a little kiss. Just one small one, there where thy hair makes shadow!"

At another time probably she would not have been displeased: it was so seldom a man mistook and made love to her. But, somehow, the American's being here made a difference. Somehow, this was not the way she wished to be seen by the American. She turned toward her gay persecutor the mask of her face—usually this was enough. But this time, perhaps because of the wine, or because of the frolic in his veins at the thought of his leave from Death's incessant haunting, or merely because the flame of the fire left her in shadow, the boy did not quit, but rather increased his half-mocking demonstration of a half-assumed order, and finally, unconsciously, she turned to the other the eyes of one harassed. He sat there at ease, half smiling, but immediate communication leaped to him from her.

"Come," he cried, "Pierre! Quit this—you're an utter nuisance!"

And smiling at her, he added, enunciating very slowly and carefully: "One must pardon him, mademoiselle: he is a little *saoul*, *vous savez*."

The contrast between his scrupulous manner and his use of that word "*saoul*," supposed to be uttered only by such low-class people as she, and not by gentlemen like him; the funny mewling drawl of his "voo-oo-ah saaav-ez"; and something so simple about him—these things suddenly created in her a tender delight, and she broke out laughing. He joined in, laughing at himself; the other joined in: all three were laughing. The young Frenchman, content with himself, and rather glad to have been stopped, let her be.

But then, after they had laughed, there was no more reason for staying. The fire was now drawing finely; everything about the room was in order; the two friends, in their chairs, were lighting their pipes. Célestine tiptoed out and closed the door.

She was out in the dark cold hall once more, all alone. But something of them was there. Their boots. They stood at the door, two pairs of them; one pair standing up stiff, as if at attention, the other pair careened over, as if tired. She gathered them up to her bosom, and took them up to her room to clean them.

By the light of the candle, reflected in her cracked mirror, she looked at them long after she had set them up on her washstand. One pair was light, of fine leather moulded to slender leg, and just a little fussy with many hooks; the other two were heavy and honest, and with enormous feet—ah, enormous!

She held the boots up before her eyes to realize fully the enormity of those feet, and laughed delightedly—then passed her hands over them in caress.

She now set to work and scrubbed and polished with adoration till late into the night.

They left early in the morning, and she did not see them. Once they called for hot water, but seized the pitcher with disembodied hands that reached out at the end of bare arms thrust through the door's narrow crack. And when they came downstairs, all ready to go, her first intention, which

had been to view them in their lustrous boots, dissolved into a sudden panic which sent her scurrying into the farthest depths of the black corridor.

So she did not see them, and when they returned they did not stop at the inn, but reported directly to the camp. The first she knew of their return was when, from her daily stationing in the field, she saw them, winged once more, swooping down like thunder out of the drifting opalescence of a sunset sky. The old relation reestablished itself; every afternoon, in the field across the way from the Fliers' Camp, Célestine stood and waited, and watched them as they homed.

As she stood thus in the clover field one late afternoon a plane came winging all alone from afar toward the camp—fast, with the directness of a wounded thing seeking its lair to die. As it came near, it did not approach the ground in the usual gradual circlings, but lit straight, with a sort of desperate urgency—and Célestine recognized the young Frenchman. Even as he still rolled along the ground, his helmet-framed face was turned sidewise toward the sheds, and with open mouth he was shouting out a question. Everybody about the camp was running to him; when the plane at last came to a standstill, all the men of the camp, pilots and mechanics, were grouped about it. Sagging in his seat, again he was asking the question. Célestine, from where she stood, could not hear at all, but just as surely as if she had heard, she knew that it was a question he was thus asking with his open mouth, and what question.

The men about the plane all shook their heads negatively; then, all together, they raised their heads and looked afar toward the east, the seams in their faces showing deep.

The flier climbed stiffly out of his cockpit and stood among the others. He was relating something. Not able to hear a word, Célestine followed what he said, terribly, by the way his hands went. There had been a combat. Two planes high in flight—this the two hands showed—and then many, many attacking them. The two hands, in fight and flight, darted here, darted there, rose, fell, turned over, slid side-wise down, for a while stubbornly together. Then the two hands went apart—and the tale continued, told by only one hand—the tale of one plane only—of the teller's own

plane. That plane was alone, cut off, pursued by many, in dire distress; it twisted and strove like a moth in a flame. Finally it abandoned itself, it fell; fell long, forsaken and loose like a dead leaf—it was doomed. But no—abruptly, the descriptive hand, almost touching the earth, straightened out with a supple movement; the plane, at full speed, went scuttling along the heads of the wheat, the pursuit shaken off, free!

The narrator halted. Again he shouted his question, fiercely, as though the violence of it might have potency in creating the right answer. But the others, all shaking their heads, stepped free from the plane and looked upward in the sky, toward the east.

It was time for Célestine to go, but she could not go. In the field she remained, waiting—but out of the east no more planes were coming. The crying of the child in its carriage finally recalled her to herself.

During the following days she saw that the young Frenchman was not flying; he loitered aimlessly among the sheds. He began to come to the inn. He would sit in a corner, looking fixedly at his table, drinking one glass of strong stuff after the other, till finally, told that the place was shutting up for the night, he would stiffly depart without a glance at the one who had spoken.

Then one day he shook himself and rose after the first drink. And the following afternoon Célestine saw that he was flying once more, captain of a squadron of five.

This, somehow, settled her last doubt, and when night had come, in a corner of the inn garden, she made a little grave.

It was thus they did in her native village, in Brittany. There, when a fisherman, gone to the far banks of Iceland, did not return at the end of the season, little untenanted graves were made along the churchyard wall in memory of those who had thus vanished.

Célestine made such a grave, in a corner of the garden where two thick stone walls met behind a thick chestnut tree. The recess was well hidden; few ever came there. She made a rectangular outline with white pebbles, drawing it thin so that one happening here should not quite be sure of what he saw; she bought a small Virgin of green porcelain and set it at the head. The little Virgin stood there always,

a rosary drawn through her rudimentary hand, and with downcast eyes seemed to meditate upon the grave.

Every night now, no matter how weary she was, Célestine came here, and in the silence and the darkness said a prayer. This is all she had of what had passed—the little make-believe grave, and the nightly prayer, there in the secret silence behind the tree. The war had moved on to the east; there was talk of great victories; and the flying camp had gone to other parts as suddenly as it had come a few months before.

The moment of prayer at the end of the day came to have for her a sweet importance. It coloured the day, the long hard day. It lay there ahead, through the effort, the sweat, and the grime, like a small still harbour of pure blue water. And its peace overflowed back into the day; it made of the whole day a still, white peace. Within the peace she moved and toiled as if in a haze, deliciously numb of life's asperities and life's screams.

The war ended; she held to her grave, her prayer, and her secret, and a year went by. Then, one summer day, suddenly he reappeared, solid, alive, in flesh and blood.

She was washing the red flagging at the entrance of the court, and was on her knees amid soap and suds, as the omnibus, come from the station with many valises on its top, halted before the entrance. And he, leaping out, turned to give his hand to a fair-haired girl who was stepping down after him.

At first Célestine did not believe her eyes; then, when she did, she began to tremble. Kneeling there on the wet flagging, she trembled and trembled, her big opaque blue eyes raised to the newcomers as if they had been gods arisen from the sea.

His eyes fell upon her. "Hello," he said shortly, "there's Madelon!"

"*Bonjour*, Madelon," he said, in that French which had so delighted her that day so long ago. "*Bonjour*, Madelon—do you not remember me?"

The fair-haired girl, standing by his side, her hand trustingly resting on his arm, also was looking down at the kneeling woman. Célestine rose suddenly, and, altogether shaken out of her usual heavy reticence, cried: "My faith—I had thought you dead!"

A burst of laughter from both, after a moment's hesitation followed her words, and she, too, found herself laughing.

"My faith," she explained, "you flew away and never came back!"

"It was to Germany I flew, Madelon—not because I wanted to. And you're not the only one who thought me gone to another place. But now I live in America once more, and this is my new little wife. Shake hands with my little wife, Madelon."

Célestine wiped her hands laboriously on her apron, and took, in one thick red one, the little white one offered her.

"And now me," he said, and pumped her hand up and down, while she felt her face distended in a stupid grin.

But there were things to see about, many things. She ran to the valises and began to carry them in. She ran upstairs to the room, and refreshed the sheets and pillow slips; brought clear water. A sort of mad joy was in her heart, and her thick legs were light. In a moment, between jobs, she ran out into the court and, stooping behind the chestnut tree, with one large gesture of her heavy hand, scattered the little white pebbles and whisked the little Virgin into her pocket.

They remained three days, the young man and his bride; three days during which Célestine spent herself in an adoration of service.

Then they were gone—away to some of the other battle-fields they went to visit—gone for ever.

For some time the happiness of those three days remained in Célestine's heart like a vague resonance of music, then little by little her life discoloured into a bleak emptiness. The memory of the return, the fact that he whom she had mourned was really alive—these things her mind somehow would not hold; little by little they ceased to be in her; they were no guard and no refuge, and she missed greatly what had been before.

The happy haze in which she had then stirred was gone; life once more was sharp and screamed; out of the profundities of a deep stillness, like a happy dead disturbed, she had been brought up to a surface of raw airs and intolerable glitters.

After a time she knew what she missed; now and then the knowledge brought her, hesitant, to the small inclosed space behind the chestnut tree.

Then one night her mind was made up. From her small room beneath the eaves she stole down into the darkened garden.

Down on both knees, in the dark damp space behind the chestnut tree she outlined with white pebbles a small simulated grave; she placed at its head the little porcelain Virgin.

There—it was done. With bowed head, she said a prayer. Every night now she came here and said a prayer.

And little by little the old happiness returned, and finally it was as though he had never come back. At the end of each day stood the awaiting moment of prayer like a small still harbour of pure blue water. Its peace overflowed back into the day; it made of the entire day a still, white peace. The delicious numbness once more enwrapped her in its soft haze, deadening life's sharp angles and sharp screams.

It was as though he had not returned; the memory of this interruption grew fainter and fainter; flattened out; ceased to be. She was left with her sweet dim sorrow; her grave, her secret, and her prayer.

WITCH MARY

By GENEVIEVE LARSSON

From Pictorial Review

HAS ANY one of you seen Witch Mary of late?" Wise Olaf, keeper of the country store, asked the question of the farmers gathered in a group on the "grocery side." A curious, vivid silence followed. They had been rejoicing over their fields of grain, which stood, as one man had exultantly proclaimed, high as a man's arms, and were heavy with promise. Some made as if to speak, shifted uneasily, sucked back the half-formed words.

"Well?" questioned Wise Olaf.

Through the summer stillness a wind swept up from the river, came sighing in through the open door, and rattled the loose papers about. There was something eerie, electric, about it, as though it carried with it an unseen presence.

"Hush! The women will hear you!" cautioned one, glancing across the room.

"Not seen a sign of her all summer; but that's a good sign," nervously ventured a gnarled, bent old man, stooping over the counter to pick up a stray coffee bean. He rubbed it between his horny palms, and then fell to munching it, his long chin nearly meeting his nose in the process. Assuming an attitude of cheerfulness, he glanced around carelessly, and then slumped back into a chair.

The women across the room were busy examining the rolls of blue and brown denim that Wise Olaf's Kaisa displayed upon the counter, and had been chattering together busily. The summer was a good one, and they could buy extra yards. Underlying their Northern speech, in which were represented various provincial dialects of Sweden, was an undercurrent of wistful melancholy, as though they feared to be too joyous,

lest some unforeseen disaster come upon them in the midst of their plenty. Now, quick to note a change of feeling in the men's talk, they stopped, broken sentences suspended in the air, reluctantly left the goods upon the counter, and crossed to the other side.

"But what is it?" asked Kaisa, looking around at the guilty faces.

"We were just talking about Witch Mary," answered Wise Olaf.

"We agreed, long ago, not to talk of her." Kaisa's voice was high-pitched, nervous. Her keen, rather hard-featured face lit up with a curious, avid expression. "As long's you've started, *has* any one seen her?"

"Not one time during the whole summer," answered Olga, a fair, comely matron. "Though from my place I can see the top of the hill. Sometimes I run out, when the sun is high, thinking to catch a glimpse of her. The trees must have grown up about the hut. Every day, I remember, the year of the drought, I could see her standing there, waving her cane with one hand, and the other held to her brow, looking out over the valley."

"The river, you mean," put in Wise Olaf, carefully tying a package with his knotted hands.

A tremor passed over the crowd.

"I doubt not it was the river," said Olga, rebuked. The men, some standing, others seated on chairs, placed conveniently about, puffed more heavily at their long corn-cob pipes.

"Sometimes," Olga continued shamefacedly, "she looked so lonely standing there. Just as if she were turned to a statue of grief. I wanted to run up and comfort her. But I never dared. Besides, Sven would not permit me. And there is no road, only this path, leading down to the river."

"A good thing for you that you didn't go," said the gnarled old man, trying to speak lightly. "Silent Sven would have been left a widower." The men laughed relievedly, and the shy young giant standing beside the counter flushed to the roots of his yellow hair.

"Oh, I don't know," finished Olga, weakly. "I—I am sorry for her, poor old soul!"

"Some say she was seen the day Black Eric left," Kaisa's shrill voice broke in. "She stepped in front of him on the

road, and the horses stopped dead. She cursed him as usual. "So you are going away," she screamed; "but I will follow you—I will follow you!" He struck at her with his whip, but she avoided him. "I hope you die!" he shouted at her, and she screamed back, "Ay, though I were dead a thousand years, my hate for you would bring me back!" "

"*Ja, käre Gud!*" sighed a wrinkled old crone. "Let us stop talking of this and finish our buying." She turned to cross the store; nobody heeded her, and, as though reluctant to miss anything, she stayed.

"Perhaps Black Eric took her with him"—the man who spoke laughed hollowly—"for not once since, as near as I can figure, has she been seen.

"That's likely!" retorted Wise Olaf. "She's the only thing he was ever afraid of."

"I didn't think he'd stay away this long," said the old man, "He loved his power over us too much. And now he's gone since last November."

"Oh, he'll be back soon enough," answered Wise Olaf. "I saw Young Eric the other day. He's expecting him any time."

"I was having a good time," grumbled the old crone, puffing away at her pipe, "and you've made me ill with your talk!"

"Always in the winters before," continued Kaisa, "I have seen her coming down the path on her skis. At night, thinking no one would see her. There she'd come, swiftly, her skirts flying behind her, and straight down she would go, over the bank, and out to the spot where her daughter was drowned. You should have heard her moaning, and wringing her hands! And she would cry something terrible. Many times I've asked Olaf to build us a house elsewhere, and not live here in the store like heathen folk, where we had to see such a sight and listen to such things. 'Tis not good for the children."

"I've heard," said Olga, her voice soft and pitying, "that she was just like other people before she lost the girl. That they were very happy, even though they were so poor, with their little garden and their hut. Perhaps she is like others still, only we are afraid of her, and that makes her queer. Perhaps we should go up and see if anything has happened to her?" She looked around questioningly, her blue eyes pleading.

"I've often said so to Kaisa," answered Wise Olaf. "It's you women, I said, should go——"

"How can you expect us to go," asked Kaisa angrily, "when you men are afraid?"

"And with good reason," cackled the old man, his toothless gums still busy with the coffee bean. "I'm old here, and I know. I was with those that went up, shortly after we'd found the daughter, and Witch Mary had had her brought up there, and buried beside the hut——"

"Beside the hut—think of that! That was no Christian thing to do. You must have known then there was something wrong."

"Why, no. We thought that natural enough, crazed with grief as she was. Never shall I forget when we found the body and carried it home. One of us could have carried her easily, so light she was. And beautiful, even when dead. Like an angel that's been caught asleep." His voice took on a dreamy, far-away tone. "Her hair was loose, and so long it swept the ground. It looked *alive*, and we dared not touch it, so we carried her high——"

The room was silent. Outside rang the voices of children playing among the willows.

"And the water fell from her hair, like great tears, all along the path——"

In the heavy silence the women stood motionless, eyes downcast. The men held their bodies rigidly. A burst of wind entered, passed through with a long, drawn-out sigh. It died with a moan. They started up apprehensively.

Kaisa rudely broke the silence. "But go on," she said. "What happened when you went up afterward? After the girl was buried? We've never heard the real truth about that."

"A week later, all in a friendly spirit, we went to her, thinking to buy her trees. The rest of us were cleaning out our timber. And she had the best trees of all, standing on the level stretch behind the hut, where they could easily be rolled right down to the river and taken to the mill. It would have relieved her poverty, and we thought that would help. We didn't look for her to take on so, seeing we came for that——"

"Well?" questioned Kaisa, her black eyes snapping with curiosity.

"Black Eric was with us," the old man went on. "That was a mistake, I suppose, seeing she blamed it all on him. Though I don't know that he was guilty. He said she jumped right out of the boat, and that he couldn't save her——"

"There are those," said Olga, darkly, "that think he *wouldn't*. That he'd coaxed her into the boat against her will, and that she had no choice. It was death—or something worse. *That* was like him!" Her breast heaved with excitement.

"What use to dig it up?" asked the old man gently. "No one really knows. Anyway, Black Eric went along, though he acted queer. One of the men had told him he daren't. That's how he came to go. Too much of a blusterer to take a dare. Everything was quiet when we got there. We rapped at the door, and no one answered. Then we went on to where the girl was buried, near the hut between two large oaks. There lay Mary, with the cloth tied around her head, and her red shawl around her shoulders, just as we've seen her dressed ever since. Lying flat down on the grave. I thought at first she was dead. So must the rest have thought, and Black Eric shrieked out, 'O God, she's dead!' Then we heard a dreadful weeping, and she got up—no, I did not see her get up, but there she stood.

"In a few days she'd grown into an old woman, though she wasn't young, even when the girl was born. But such a face as she turned to us! Like an old parchment containing saga lore. Wrinkled and mad with grief, but with a *power*! Almost as if she could have swept us away with one hand. Her eyes bored through us—they were like burnt-out cinders, dead, but yet terribly alive. When she saw Black Eric she went wild. She shrieked and whirled before us until I was dizzy. Some of the men were so afraid they didn't even *see* her; she blinded them. She hurled her curses. Never, never have I seen such a sight!"

"Oh, poor thing, poor thing!" choked Olga, thinking, no doubt, of her own mother, lonely and bent with work in far-away Vermland.

"She drove us down the hill. Frightened as we all were, no one of us was shaken with terror as Black Eric was. Never has any one ventured near her since, though God knows how she lives. It's not often we let a neighbour go without food.

That's not our way. But what could we do? There was a little clearing where she had her garden, and she and her girl used to work in the old days, but she's old now, and even if she were able——"

"She has never so much as bought a pound of coffee here," hastened Kaisa. "Half starved she must be, and frozen in the winter."

"I hope he never comes back!" cried Olga passionately.

"He? Who?" questioned Kaisa.

"Black Eric. He's evil—he's——"

"Oh, as for that," said the old man, "no one knew if he was guilty or not. There was no proof. And I've heard said he's coming—soon. But one should not blame him too much. He was young when this happened, and he loved the girl——"

"Love? You call that love?" Olga's tones were hot with wrath. She looked at her husband, Silent Sven, and her face changed and softened. Her little girl came running in through the open door, clasping a bunch of purplish-blue flowers in her hand. She pushed through the crowd and burrowed her golden head in her mother's skirts.

"I am, afraid, Mamma; I am afraid," she panted, trembling violently.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, *lillä vannen*," comforted her mother, trying to steady her own voice. "We are right here where we can see you through the windows."

"Where did you get those flowers?" Kaisa's tones were sharper than usual. "Not on the river bank, surely."

"Gerda and I—we went up—up the path a little ways just a little ways," said the girl, "to pick them."

"That's blue vervain!" screamed Kaisa, raising her arms in horror. "Throw it away, child; it's cursed!"

The little girl dropped the flowers.

"Pick it up and throw it out!" she ordered.

"Hush!" said Olga, stooping for the flowers. "Do not frighten the little one. That's but an old foolish superstition."

She crossed to the door and flung the blossoms far. Coming back, she asked Silent Sven if he had some candy for the children. He pulled a bulky bag from his pocket.

"Do not go up the path again," cautioned Olga. "Stay on the river bank. Now run and play with the others. Mind you give some candy to the rest!"

The girl reached eagerly for the bag and started for the door, drying her eyes with one hand. She ran off the board platform, darted between the wagons hitched in front of the store, and on down to the river bank where the children were swinging on the young willows.

"I do believe some one else is coming," cried Olga, going to the window and peering out. She uttered a dismayed cry, and the rest crowded behind her.

Black Eric dashed up in a smart new buggy, to which were hitched two slim, shining horses. A moment later, whip in hand, he entered the store. He looked around, smiling at the group, and began shaking hands, greeting each one jovially.

"And here's Olga, too," he cried, his black eyes snapping with delight as he stepped up to her. The young woman's face flushed hotly. Silent Sven edged nearer.

"My name is Mrs. Nillson," she said coldly, refusing to take his hand.

"Ven can I come for coffee and some of your good *äppel-kaka*?" he smirked, laughing at her dismay.

"Talk Swede so I can understand," croaked the old woman puffing viciously at her pipe, "and leave Olga alone. You needn't put on airs, for all you've been to the city."

"Well, old sourface!" he answered good-naturedly. "Anything to please such a beauty as you! *Ta' mej fan*, but I'm glad to be back!" He looked around from face to face, but saw no gleam of welcome. "What's the matter?" he asked abruptly. They shrank away, as if fearing the ring of command in his voice.

Olga touched her husband's arm. "Let's go, dear," she coaxed. "Let's go at once."

"We'll stay yet awhile," answered Sven, flashing her a reassuring smile.

"He'll get them all in his power," she whispered. "Just as he had them before. Every one of us. I can feel it in his voice." She tugged at his sleeve.

"I'm not in his power, and I said we'd stay awhile," he answered quietly.

"What brought you back, Eric?" asked Wise Olaf. "Love for Young Eric, I suppose?" The crowd responded with a smothered laugh.

Black Eric chose not to take offence. "Why, as for that,"

he said, "perhaps I did want to see Young Eric. It's natural enough for a father to want to see his son, isn't it? But that wasn't the real reason. I came because I couldn't sleep. Night after night I lay awake, and always I heard a curious sound, like a tapping, tapping, tapping. I thought if I came back here I could rest again——"

"A tapping!" cried Olga. "Then you did take Witch Mary with you!"

Black Eric's face, pale before, lost the last vestige of colour. He wheeled upon her. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"The tapping of her cane!" she answered. "She's not been seen since you left."

"I hope to God she's dead!" There was a note of defiant relief in Black Eric's voice. At the shout of protest that greeted his words he became placating. "Well, she's done us all harm, hasn't she? She brought the drought upon us with her curse. She cursed yet again, and the dam broke up the river, and the flood came and drowned many of our cattle. She——"

Swarming in through the door came the children, cutting short his speech. They ran, terrified, to their mothers.

"I knew it!" sobbed Olga's girl. "I knew something awful would come!"

"But what is it? What's the matter?" cried the women, alarmed.

Kaisa's boy, the oldest of the children, answered. "The Witch! Witch Mary! She came down the path to the river. Didn't you hear her clicking her old cane? Didn't you hear her curse?"

"Will she—will she—come in here, I wonder?" faltered one woman.

"She said the serpent of the river would get him! She cried it out! She waved her cane and said that!"

"No," protested another child, "she said she would kill him!"

"I could not see her—I was so—so scared!" a third added, with chattering teeth.

Black Eric stood silent, his face pale and twitching. He was evidently fighting for control.

"Where'd she go?" he asked.

"Down to the river!"

"No, she went back in the woods. She went fast, like the wind!"

They crowded to the windows, the children still clinging to their mothers. Beyond the river bank stretched a sand-bar, gleaming white in the sun. The river coiled and twisted like sensuous green snakes writhing together.

"There she is, Mamma! See her through the willows!" cried Kaisa's boy excitedly.

"O God, yes, there she is! Her clothes are frayed, they blow about her, she waves her cane in the air!"

"Where, where?" pleaded a voice.

"Red shawl dragging on her shoulder, cloth around her head!"

"*Ja käre Gud!*" gasped one.

"Can't you hear her, Mamma?" wailed the little girl. "She's muttering——"

A peculiar moaning broke upon them.

"'Tis but the river, child," soothed Olga. "Hush, *vännern*, do not cry so!" Her own voice was wavering, full of a nameless fear.

"Muttering her curses, of course," finished Black Eric, laughing hideously.

"She'll bring some awful thing upon us, even now, with our harvests full!" sobbed the old crone. Her pipe fell unheeded to the floor.

"*Ta' mej fan* if she will!" cried Black Eric, suddenly straightening his shoulders and throwing back his head. "It's a good thing I came back just in time. What are you, a parcel of weaklings, to let her bring you bad luck with her curses?"

"She has done no harm," ventured Olga, but her words sounded feeble.

"Done no harm!" shrieked Black Eric, cracking his whip. "There was the time when the spring was well on the way. The grain was already up from the ground. The wheat was doing bravely, and the rye was a foot tall. She hadn't been seen for some time——"

"You'd been gone, then, too, I remember," accused Olga. "You'd been gone, and we hadn't seen her, and when you returned she——"

"That's nothing to do with it!" he snapped. "She appeared, and cursed us——"

"She cursed *you*, you mean." Olga hid behind her husband, peering out at Black Eric with hate in her eyes. "She has never troubled us——"

"The bad luck fell upon all alike, didn't it? With the grain as green as could be, and no crows to speak of. Everything pointed to a good summer. And what happened, I ask you?" His tones rang out clearly now, swept over them with hypnotic spell.

"Come, Sven, before he gets us in his power," she whispered.

"The rains came down and washed it all away. We had to sow the second time, and then it was too late, and we lost everything, even the seed. And the rains washed away much of our land, dragged it into the ravines——"

"That is true!" sighed the old man, looking even older and more wrinkled.

The faces of the men lengthenend, became sad and thoughtful. Memories of long, hard years of heart-breaking toil lingered with them. Many were bent and broken in the struggle, their joints swollen and knotted with rheumatism from the cruel winters. Ah, it had taken years to win their small farms from the hold of the forests, here on the hilly slopes of Wisconsin. They had given their lives to it.

"It might have happened anyway," pleaded Olga, gazing fearfully around upon the altered faces of the men. "We can't expect all the years to be good as this one. Farmers everywhere have some bad years——"

"And there was the time," Black Eric, his eyes gleaming evilly, went on, paying no attention to her interruption, "that the children were coming home from school. They had made wreaths of poison-ivy and hung them around their necks. Witch Mary met them, and told them they would die at sundown. Did they not nearly die?" he demanded, this time addressing the women.

"What are you saying?" cried Olga, drawing the little girl closer. "I have never heard of that."

"We thought best not to speak of it, lest the children get too frightened," said Kaisa. "Young Eric nearly died,

as it was. And certain it is they would all have died if they had not come home in time for us to treat them."

Olga stooped to lift the little girl, passionately folding her close.

"Each time she has cursed us it has been something more terrible," Black Eric's voice rang out. "God knows what it will be this time! And always it has happened when our crops were doing nicely and our hopes were high——"

"That is true; yes, yes, that is true!"

"So now, with your barns so full of hay it sticks out for yards at the open sides and your grain ready to harvest, now—she comes cursing again! And you men are weak enough to let her rob you of this! And you women! What are you, that you will let her curse your children? Such mothers! Bah! Even a dog will protect its young! Yes, like as not it will fall upon the children this time——"

"No, no, no!" The women shrank from him. Some staggered as though they would have fallen, and sat weakly down. A brutal look was dawning in the faces of the men. Silent Sven alone was not moved; his arms were folded in front, his head thrown back.

"Even in the old days," Black Eric went on, "before people were civilized, they destroyed the witches that brought them harm. They drove them out! They burned them at the stake!"

"No, no!" Olga found her voice with a choking effort. "You will not be so cruel—you will not burn her!"

Black Eric's eyes gleamed savagely. He towered above them, triumphantly.

"I shouldn't advise that," he agreed, "but—to drive her out——"

"Who is to do this?" quavered a voice.

"Look, Mamma," cried the little girl. "She is running back to the woods!"

"Running back to the hut," shrilled Kaisa, peering out, "with her plaid shawl hanging over her bones!"

"Now is the time!" cried Black Eric. "Now, when you can catch her in the hut! Go quickly, you men!"

"And what about *you*?" Silent Sven addressed Black Eric for the first time.

"Me?" cringed Black Eric. "It—would not—do for me——"

"Oh, you *daren't!*" Silent Sven flung the challenge at him.

"*Daren't!* You can't say that word to me! Come on, all of you! I will lead you! I will show you if I dare!" He started for the door, the men preparing to follow him.

"I will go, too!" cried Olga. "You shall not burn her; I can at least see to that!"

"I would burn her," retorted Kaisa. "I would help light the fagots! Olaf, you stay in the store."

"Is that so?" said Olaf, with gleaming eyes. "I shall be needed, like as not. 'Tis a woman's place to stay at home."

"I'm not going to be cheated of this!" Kaisa turned to the old crone. "You stay," she coaxed. "You couldn't climb the hill, anyway. It's a long hill."

"I can climb the hill," quavered the old woman. "I can climb it as well as anybody. I shall go with the others. See, everyone is going. I shall not stay behind."

"I will give you a pound of coffee, the best in the store. I will give you two yards of cloth for an apron."

The old woman's eyes narrowed to slits. "Five pounds of coffee," she wheedled, "and five yards of your best goods, or I go with the rest!"

"Five pounds! No, that I will never——"

"And some tobacco! Yes, I think I must have some tobacco!"

"Oh, give it to her!" cried Wise Olaf. "Give it her, and let us be on!"

Cautioning the children to play on the bank until their return, they formed in a group at the base of the hill, where the path led up to Witch Mary's hut. Black Eric cracked his whip. The men picked up long sticks, all except Silent Sven. Viking cruelty shone in their faces. The women would have clung to their arms, but the men shook them off and started ahead, Black Eric leading.

It was a tangled path, knotted across by roots of trees and shrubs. The branches of the trees interlaced above, forming a shady arch. All along, beside the way, slender spires of blue vervain lifted their purple blossoms to the random sun.

"See," said Kaisa, awed by the luxuriant growth. "See how thick it is. And witches have always used it in their caldrons. No wonder it grows here!"

"But the vervain," protested Olga, "the vervain grew on Mount Calvary, and it has the power of healing."

"You will say next, I suppose," Kaisa retorted, "that it has been watered by the old witch's tears!"

"Come on, you women!" called Wise Olaf. "Do not lag behind!"

The women became silent, not stopping again to take note of the flowers beside the way. They panted after the men, who were climbing rapidly.

"Can you see the hut?" called Kaisa, pausing to get her breath.

"No, the trees have grown up about it. And don't *talk*—she'll hear us."

"I'd no idea it was such a hard hill." Kaisa's face was red; her eyes were wildly excited.

"Do you think they will kill her?" whispered Olga. "Even Sven looked fierce."

"'Twould serve her right."

As they neared the top the women too picked up stout sticks. "Just to help us climb," suggested one, as if ashamed.

"I want no stick," said Olga, but she stopped for a moment with the others. "Oh, look! You can see the river from here—just the place, I believe, where the girl was drowned!"

The men called them again, and by the time they had caught up, the top of the hill was reached. They paused a moment at the edge of the clearing. Young trees had grown so high that they overshadowed the hut. The wind rattled through the leaves in hollow whispers. They saw the hut at last, sagging between the branches. The stovepipe had fallen, but still clung to the rotted shingles. The one window overlooking the river was broken and had not been repaired.

"It was a poor hut, at best," said the old man. "Let us not be too hard on her."

"Ho!" blustered Eric, swinging around to face the speaker savagely. "You are already weakening, are you?"

A debating silence followed, then the old man decided. "No, she must be driven out."

They made their difficult way through tangled weeds and shrubs to the door, which faced the woods behind.

"You rap," said Black Eric. "One of you, any one."

"Not I." Wise Olaf shook his head. The others shrank back.

"What about *you?*" Silent Sven again challenged the leader. "You—you are afraid to!"

"I am afraid, am I?" he sputtered. He walked unsteadily to the door, his face haggard with fear.

"Everything is silent—silent as the grave," whispered Olga, clinging to her husband's arm, openly afraid.

"What's that?" a startled voice cut in. "Sobbing? Was that sobbing?" A wailing note swept through the trees.

"Hush!"

Black Eric raised his hand. The knob was rusty, the door sunken in. He rapped, feebly at first, his hands trembling like aspen-leaves. Getting no response but an empty echo from within, he struck his fist heavily against the door. It almost gave way.

"Open the door, Witch!" he cried. "You can't hide from us!"

"Don't be so harsh," begged Olga, her voice the wraith of a whisper. "You will frighten her to death!"

Goaded to desperation, he raised his fist, and gave the door a terrific blow. It fell with a soft thud, the rotted wood crumbling on the floor. He stepped in, the rest following.

A thick carpet of dust lay over the floor. No imprint upon it, except some tracks left by wandering rats. A stove, red with rust and warped beyond recognition, stood one one side, supporting an old country metal coffeepot, filmed with black. Cobwebs hung from the rude rafters overhead. The round home-made rugs, once brave with gay colours, looked like little mounds of earth. Beside the broken window stood a sagging spinning wheel, so long unused that it drooped in utter dejection, one spindle fallen down.

At first bewildered, utterly struck dumb, then filled with horror too deep for words, the people looked around the room, its silent pathos striking like icy hands across their consciousness.

"She has not—*lived* here!" Kaisa found her voice first.

She stooped and picked up a rusty pan lying beside the stove, and hung it on a bent nail, as though in this small act she found consolation.

"What—what is that—over there?" She pointed to a curtain drawn over an object on one side.

There was a gasp. "Maybe—maybe she is—dead—behind——"

"Dead! You fools!" shrieked Black Eric. "Didn't we just see her?" He staggered to the curtain, grasped it roughly. It fell, a crumpled mass of dust and decayed cloth, disclosing the two built-in bunks, now empty, where Mary and her daughter had slept.

"There, you see! She must be living in the outhouse, the barn. She—she kept the cow there. Let's look for her there." And he passed over what had been the door, the rest following.

"The grave!" cried the old man. "I remember where it was. Let us look for the grave!"

"Leave the grave alone!" choked Black Eric, his face twitching horribly. "She is out in the barn, I tell you! See, I think she is there!" He pointed a shaking finger to another broken-down hut between the trees.

"We will find the grave," said Silent Sven. "You said it was between the oaks."

"I won't go there!" gasped Black Eric. "Let us look——"

"You'll come with us!" Silent Sven commanded, grasping Black Eric by the shoulder and dragging him along. Silent and awed, the crowd proceeded through the tangle of weeds and young trees to the side of the hut between the two oaks. Some of the men began to poke around with their sticks, but Olga stopped them.

The old man motioned silently to a depression in the ground. "It is long ago," he whispered. "The grave—is sunken."

Olga fell on her knees, sobbing convulsively. She reached out her hands and reverently brushed aside the leaves that lay upon the grave, then started up, a cry of terror on her lips.

Within the depression, where she had scraped the leaves away, a human skeleton lay bleaching, stained almost to the colour of brown twigs. As they bent over they saw a skull, through the sockets of which rose the slender spires of a

plant, covering it mercifully with clusters of purplish-blue flowers. A rusty iron cross lay beside it.

"That is—that is where she lay—when we came up," quavered the old man. "She lay there——"

The women began to sob unrestrainedly, Kaisa's voice wailing above the others. The men turned upon Black Eric, their sticks raised high, terror forgotten in a mighty wave of revenge that swept its fire over them.

"It isn't true!" he gasped, his teeth clicking together. "It isn't, I tell you! Haven't we seen her—all these years? Didn't we—see her—this——"

Before the look in their faces he slunk away. He stumbled past the hut, the thorny branches reaching out their hands, catching him, tearing his clothes. On down the path, his terrified flight impeded by the gnarled roots.

Behind him followed a human avalanche, great cries issuing from their throats, sticks raised, ready to strike. Silent Sven fought his way to the front, called them to silence. "Let him go!" His voice rang out. "Let him go! His fear will punish him, far, far more than we could punish him! It will follow him, as it has followed him all these years. But never again will it affect us, and *she* is at rest!"

Before him, in the gap left by the branches, lay the river, coiling and twisting in the sun, a waiting, hungry look upon its face.

THE BAMBOO TRAP

BY ROBERT S. LEMMON

From Short Stories

A LETTER, *patrón*."

One corner of the mosquito bar that made of the tent fly an airy, four-walled room was lifted and a brown hand thrust in the envelope with its array of foreign postmarks and smudgy thumb-prints, all but concealing the familiar American stamp. Outside, the steady roar of the Chanchan River, softened by distance as it charged down the last pitches of the Andes on its way to the Gulf of Guayaquil and the Pacific, blended into a musical background for the messenger's guttural voice.

John Mather laid down the birdskin on which he was working and reached eagerly for the missive. Any word from the outside world was a godsend here in the jungle—doubly so when it came in the form of a letter whose bulk proclaimed several pages of home news. He ripped open the flap with dexterous, capable fingers and flattened the folded sheets on the camp table before him among the litter of skinning tools, cotton, and specimen labels.

For a space he read absorbedly, sensing behind the cold impersonality of the typewritten words the analytical mind of the man who had dictated them. Not until he came to the last page did his expression change and a half frown pucker the corners of his eyes.

"Hell!" he growled. "Isn't that the way of things? Just when I'm finishing up my collections here, too, and planning to catch the next steamer north. No Christmas at home this year! Let's see—how many of the damn things does he say he wants?" He re-read the final paragraphs of the letter, mumbling them half aloud in the manner of one in whom

many years of living alone in the back of the world's beyond have bred the habit of self-conversation:

"The Department of Entomology is extremely desirous of securing several specimens of the Cuabandan spider, to complete their habitat group of insects from the high Andes. It seems that the ones they intended to use proved to be rather poorly prepared and could not be mounted satisfactorily.

"Also, I am in receipt of a letter from the International Museum in Chicago offering to exchange a valuable collection of humming-bird skins from Guatemala for a complete series of these same spiders. You know how incomplete our Guatemalan material is, and therefore how anxious I am to secure these specimens from Dr. Huston. He asks that we furnish him with at least a dozen Cuabandans of both sexes, and perhaps twice that number of immature ones.

"You will find the spiders inhabiting the slopes of the mountain Chuquipata, probably between the 9,000- and 12,000-foot levels, although reliable data on this point is impossible for me to secure. The species is decidedly rare, and I can give you little information to help you in your search. Beyond their appearance and great size, with which you are perhaps familiar, and the fact that they are carnivorous and often prey upon small birds, nothing is really known of them. I shall depend upon you to remain in the region long enough to gain at least an outline of their life habits.

"I am sorry to have to give you this new assignment, Mather, because I judge from your last letter that you have about finished your field work on the west side of the mountains and are looking forward to your return to New York. But I know that you will appreciate my position and postpone sailing for the few additional weeks which the Chuquipata expedition will entail.

All good wishes to you from myself and the Staff.

"Sincerely yours,

"ELIOT A. RODGERS,

"*Curator of Ornithology.*"

Mather folded the letter thoughtfully and thrust it into the pocket of his flannel shirt. With the buttoning down of the

flap he seemed to dismiss his irritation and become again the seasoned museum collector, taking each task as it comes and subjugating all personal desires to the duties of his calling. As he turned again to the half-skinned bird before him he summoned his Indian guide and general assistant in the terse Spanish fashion, "Pedro—*ven aquí!*"

"*Ahora sí, patrón,*" sing-songed the Quichua from the cooking lean-to near by. "*Yo no más!*" In a moment he stood before the white man, a squat, stolid figure with the humble eyes of a whipped dog.

Mather snipped the wing bones of the bird close to the body and stripped the skin down the neck and over the skull to the eyes, turning it inside out skilfully. A few crunching clips with his scissors separated head from neck and exposed the base of the brain. He set the raw body aside and commenced scooping out the clotted, grayish matter from the interior of the skull.

As he worked he spoke pointedly. "You know Chuquipata, Pedro?"

A grunt and nod signified the Indian's assent. In the presence of the American his words were customarily few, a reticence inspired not so much by awe of his employer as by inherited fear of the whites handed down from the days of the first enslaving of his race by the Spanish *conquistadores* four centuries ago.

"Rough country, isn't it? *Muchas quebradas—no?*"

Another affirmative, more vehement this time. Then, "You not go there, *patrón?*"

Mather finished cleaning the birdskin, dusted its inner surface with arsenic and alum powder to cure and preserve it, and turned it right side out again.

"Yes, we go to Chuquipata in three days," he answered as he shook the ruffled feathers into place and began filling out the skin with cotton. "You will go to the village to-morrow and get *cargadores* to carry the outfit. Four good men I will need, Pedro. Or, if you can find them, two mules instead; pack animals are better than men, but there are not many to be had. See what you can do."

He dismissed the man with a wave of the hand, and tied an identifying label to the crossed feet of his specimen. As carefully as if it were of the most fragile and costly porcelain he

wrapped the tiny green and yellow effigy of the bird in cotton to hold it in shape until feathers and skin should dry, and added it to the rows of similar mummies in the tray of his collector's trunk.

"That makes eight hundred from this region," he commented as he made the entry in a record book. "Not bad for three months' work, considering the weather I've had. It brings the total up to nearly two thousand for the whole trip, and several of the species are new to science, too. Well, I suppose I'll have to let it go at that and begin to get ready for this Chuquipata hike. It'll take nearly a day just to pick up my small mammal traps in the jungle around here."

Toward the southward end of that semi-arid plateau which stretches for three hundred rolling miles between the East and West Cordillera of the Ecuadorian Andes lies a land that God forgot. High in the air it is, as men measure such things—a matter of two vertical miles above the slow lift of the Pacific out beyond the sunset. Tumbled and stark too, a dumping ground of the Titans, a scrap heap from the furnaces in which the world was made. For in ages far beyond the memory of man, volcanic peaks whose summits have long been smoothed by the erosion of the centuries belched forth their hot lava and ash and laid a blight upon the land. Ravine, hillock, mountain, wind-swept, gaunt, and all but uninhabited, magnificent in the splendour of their distances—such is the setting of Chuquipata to-day, and such will it remain until Vulcan kindles his forge anew.

Up into this sky-top world John Mather rode on a day as glittering and telescopically clear overhead as it was harsh and dusty underfoot—up out of the green rankness of the coast jungles into a land of illimitable space. To the condor swinging a thousand feet in air, his pack-train seemed like ants crawling in single file across a rugged boulder.

Where a ravine gashed the side of Chuquipata he pitched camp on a little grassy flat protected on three sides by the crumbly walls of the cut, and braced his tent pegs with rocks against the tugging of a wind that pounced down in unexpected gusts. Scrubby brush and the stunted, gnarly trees of the high altitudes straggled here and there, promising firewood in limited and smoky quantities. A score of feet

from the tent door a brooklet tinkled under overhanging wire grass, ice-cold and diamond-clear. And above it all, stupendous in miles of waving, yellowish *páramo*, dwarfing men and camp to pigmy size, the mountain swept up and up into a cap of clouds.

When the equipment was unloaded, Mather dismissed his packers and their two mules, for he had no way of telling how long his search for the giant spiders might last, and there was no point in feeding idle mouths week after week. Only Pedro he retained, to do the camp chores and leave him entirely free for his collecting work. Besides, the Indian would be useful when, at the end of the stay, new carriers would have to be secured from one of the villages a day's march away.

It was mid-afternoon before the camp was fully arranged and Mather set out for his first survey of the area he might have to cover as with a fine tooth comb. Hopeless enough it seemed, as he looked up at it from the ravine head, an appallingly vast and rugged haystack in which to search for one small needle. Were his quarry a bird that flew or an animal that ran, the task would not have looked so hopeless. But a spider, a crawling creature of the grass and brush, probably never coming into fair view—that was different.

He set to work methodically, covering every type of ground that lay between the points which his aneroid told him were eight and twelve thousand feet above the sea. Bunch grass, scrub, rocks, volcanic ash—he went over them all with keen and patient thoroughness but no success. Inquiries of Pedro and the occasional mountain Quichuas whom he met elicited no information of value; either his attempts to describe the creatures he sought were not understood, or the spiders were so rare that even the natives were unfamiliar with them. Evening after evening he returned wearily to camp, empty-handed save for a brace of mountain partridges or a few wild pigeons which he had shot for food, or the half-dozen smaller birds of which his collection stood in need.

"If I had only had some line on the habits of the beasts it would be easier," he mused as he ate his cornbread lunch one day beside a stream that plunged down the mountain far to the north of where his camp lay. "As a matter of fact, I don't know even whether they're day or night feeders. About the only thing I'm sure of is that they're not to be found

on the south slope where I've been working. Pedro and I will have to move the outfit around to this side, I guess; the vegetation is quite different here—thicker and not so dried, as though it got more rain. I'll take a look down this spur and then work back around the base. There may be a good camp site down that way."

He picked up his gun and started to descend the ridge that dropped sharply toward a valley so far below that its brush and trees blended to a uniform sage-green carpet of marvelous softness. Rocks and beds of loose pumice that broke and slid treacherously as he crossed them covered the slope. He edged his way down cautiously, grasping the rare handholds of bush or tough grass, above him the blue spaces of the sky, the patchwork quilt of the world far-flung below.

A half-hour of this, and then the knife edge fanned out into a broader, easier descent across which trailing bamboo had spread an unbroken mat. As far as Mather could see on either side, and forward to the last steep pitch that dropped to the valley floor, that tangle of interlacing stems and offshoots extended, three feet or so above the ground and in some places strong enough to support a man's full weight. Had a leafy cloth been woven to cover the mountain's bareness it could not have more perfectly concealed what lay beneath.

"I'm not very keen to tackle that," Mather muttered, halting at the edge of the tangle. "Too tough to smash through, and not quite tough enough to walk on—I've tried ground cane before."

He looked back at the pitch he had just descended and shook his head.

"About six of one and half a dozen of the other, I guess. Damned if I'll shin up that ridge again. Can't work around the edge of this bamboo, either—those cliffs block me off. Well, here goes for a bad two hours' work."

He took the shells out of his gun, slung the weapon on his back so as to leave both hands free, and started down, choosing what appeared to be the least rugged part of the slope.

It was rough going. On hands and knees he would crawl along for a few yards over the bamboo, then strike a weak spot and smash through to the ground in a smother of leaves and hampering tendrils, scramble out and go on. By the time he was half way to the bottom of the valley he was soaked

with perspiration and nearly fagged out. Only his indomitable will and the knowledge that to turn back now would be doubly impossible kept him going.

It was nearly sunset when he reached a comparatively level stretch beyond which the mountain dropped away suddenly as though to make up for lost time. Across this place the cane was unusually thick, and he was getting along quite well, when, a few yards short of the steep slope the supporting mat broke with a ripping, tearing noise and he slithered down sickeningly into hot, pitchy darkness. Then a crunching jar, red lights flickering before his eyes, and unconsciousness.

How long he lay insensible he could not tell. It must have been many hours, for when he came to he was stiff and sore and the blood from a long scratch across his wrist had dried. A thousand tiny hammers seemed beating on his brain, each stroke an ache that quivered through a nerve. Dazedly he tried to sit up, failed, and lay flat on his back, hands clutching at the ground as he fought for control of his twitching eyes.

Gradually things steadied, and he saw that he was in a sort of pear-shaped cave perhaps a dozen yards in diameter and half as high. Daylight filtered through a ragged hole at its apex, pitifully weak, but enough to disclose the mingled rocks and earth that formed the walls of the enclosure and the whitish, diseased-looking vines that twined up them to the opening.

"That's where I fell through—that hole," Mather croaked. "Yes—that hole—fell through—yes, *fell through*. I've got to—get out—up there."

He wavered to his knees and waited grimly for the whirling in his head to abate.

"Now, let's—see," he whispered hoarsely, creeping toward the wall.

Twice he made the circuit of the cave, groping his way over boulders and loose débris that gave out a dank, nauseous odour. His hands pawed uncertainly at the walls, seeking firm holds, but finding nothing except the mass of vine stems, clammy and breaking at the first hard pull.

"Fool!" he growled at last. "I couldn't get up there anyway. It slopes in. A man can't climb on a ceiling. God!"

He slumped back and tried to think rationally.

"Let's see, now. I was coming down the mountain, headed

west. The steepest part was just ahead of me when I fell—forty-five-degree slope, about. Not more than twenty feet or so away. This hole, now—yes, it's close to forty feet wide at the bottom—maybe five feet through to the face of the slant——”

He started up eagerly, the realization that he could burrow his way out clearing his brain and putting new life in his racked body. He reached for the sheath knife at his belt, the only digging tool he had. As he stood there with it in his hand a thought flashed over him that drove all the zest from his face.

“I don't know where to begin,” he muttered. “*Which is the west side?*”

He looked about helplessly at the prison that hemmed him in. Somewhere, to right or left, ahead or behind, that mass of earth and rock must be comparatively thin, hardly more than a shell separating him from freedom and the broad reaches of the sky. If he could find that spot, strike that downhill side, he might be able to dig through to the outer world in a few hours. If he missed it, started work on the wrong side, his burrowing would only lead him deeper into the mountain, wasting his strength and the precious element of time. And between those two extremes, the heart-warming right and the hopelessly wrong, was no faintest clue to guide him to a decision. Yes, there was one—his compass, of course! Stupid not to have thought of that before; the surest possible proof. Everything was all right now.

He fumbled in the side pocket of his coat and drew out the instrument, a watchlike affair in a heavy nickel case. His first glance showed the needle bent crazily beneath the shattered glass, twisted and utterly ruined by the crash of his fall.

Mather's face went hard as he tilted the broken thing in his hand, testing its uselessness with a sort of grim irony.

“So-o,” he said bitterly. “You're about as much good to me as a piece of cheese, aren't you? Or a chunk of lead—because I could eat the cheese. Well, I guess I'll have to depend on Old Lady Luck to help me out. I may as well pick out a place that looks like easy digging, anyhow.”

He stumbled across the cave and began to pick away at the wall where the earth was crumbly and yielded readily to knife

and hands. A few inches in he struck rock. Working along it, he came finally to loose rubble, but the mass was too large for him to dislodge without starting a disastrous cave-in from above. He would have to try another place. And an hour had been wasted.

A second location was even less promising, but the third gave him hope. He burrowed on stubbornly, his fingers torn and bleeding from the sharp fragments of rock embedded in the soil like chips of glass, his muscles aching from their exertions in the cramped space which his progress created. Two feet, a yard—at this rate he ought to break through in a few more hours, unless he were working in the wrong direction. At thought of that contingency he redoubled his efforts, determined to end the uncertainty as soon as possible. And a few inches farther on he came squarely up against another boulder that defied every attempt to move it.

Exhausted and reeking with perspiration, he backed out of the hole and stretched full length on the floor of the cave. In a little while, when the cramps had left his back and shoulders, he would start in again. Yes, just a few minutes rest, and then—then he was roused from uneasy half-sleep by a slow, insistent rustling like a snake crawling through grass. He listened tensely, eyes closed in concentration, striving to locate its direction. The sound came closer, louder, on all sides of him, filling the cave with eerie whispers. Then suddenly it seemed to reach a focus close by, and a creeping hairy body brushed against his neck. With a leap he gained his feet, his eyes wide with horror.

The light in the cave had dimmed, but he could see that the walls were alive with huge spiders, thick-legged and hideous, their bodies as large as a sparrow's and covered with straggly fuzz. Some were blackish in colour, others were a sort of cherry red. They were crawling sluggishly, as though gorged with food, down the vines that reached the opening above his head. A dozen had gained the floor; others were nearly there. Hundreds more were creeping in at the hole and groping for convenient stems down which to clamber.

With a shudder Mather knew—knew that here, in this dark prison, was the night shelter, the universal rendezvous, of the beasts he had come so far to catch. By day they hunted through the cane tangle that covered the mountain-

side, perfectly concealed and safe from all detection, and as night approached they convened here from all directions to take refuge from the rains which each night spilled across the land. They were gathering now, crawling, crawling with that infernal rustling sound——

"God!" he muttered. "And he said they were rare!" Full darkness came, bringing to John Mather the torture of eternal nightmare. With hands, coat, hat, he beat and crushed the furry hordes that swarmed over him. But for every one killed two more were ready to take its place; there seemed no end to their numbers. Their curved jaws clipped into him wherever his skin was exposed. Though he could see nothing in the pitchy darkness, an odour of decay told him that shreds of flesh from their victims of days before still clung to them, and the dread of blood-poisoning obsessed him. In a quiver of loathing and fear he fought on bitterly hour after hour, dropping into snatches of exhausted sleep only to struggle up again when the writhing burden on his face threatened to choke off his breath.

At last the blackness began to gray. Dawn was coming up over the mountains, and as the light strengthened, the spiders scattered, climbing the vines again to the open air and the sunshine. Singly and in battalions they went rank after rank up the stems of their living ladders. And as the last stragglers disappeared through the opening above him Mather sat with head sunk between his hands, fighting to retain a sanity that hung on the very edge of destruction.

It must have been midday before he pulled himself together enough to eat some of the emergency rations which were as much a part of his collecting outfit as his gun or butterfly net. The food helped to steady him, and presently he began moving about under the hole at the cave's peak, trying to determine the points of the compass by the appearance of the scraps of sky he could see through the openings in the bamboo. A few minutes' study convinced him of the hopelessness of this, for leaden clouds had blotted out the sun. So uniform was their mass that he could not even detect their own direction of movement, which, if he could have ascertained, would have served as a fairly accurate indication here in this land where the prevailing wind at the higher levels blows from the east.

"I'd better get back to my digging," he told himself finally.

"It's the only chance, for Pedro would never find me among all those acres of cane, even if he knew enough to come this way to look. I didn't tell him which way I was going, when I left camp."

He groped his way into the tunnel he had started the day before and renewed his struggle with the rocks that blocked its end. He felt stronger now, and the physical work helped to shove into the background of his mind the horror that he knew the night would bring again. Perhaps he could break his way through before dark—a mere chance, but enough to add incentive to his labour.

By superhuman effort he worked out the largest rock at last, backed into the cave with it, and wriggled in again to the attack. Prying and digging with his knife, he burrowed on through earth that gave way more readily as he progressed. Sweat streamed from him unheeded; with each foot that he advanced the air in the tunnel grew warmer. A nauseating, steamy odour crept into it, so faint at first as to defy analysis, but increasing momentarily.

Presently Mather drew his hand back with an exclamation of surprise. His fingers had touched a rock so hot that it almost burned them.

"What the hell?" he growled, then lay still, thinking, his chest heaving as he gasped for breath.

Crushingly the explanation came to him: The burrow was leading into the mountain, straight forward toward those infernal caverns of molten lava and steam which underlie that whole mighty continental backbone from Cape Horn to Panama. Already he had dug far enough through the mountain's outer shell to reach the heat that radiated from them.

Mather's heart sank with the realization that all his work had gone for nothing. Then a great wave of hope swept over him as the thought came that out of this very failure sprang success, for since he had been digging toward the mountain's centre, the opposite way must lead to light and life and freedom.

He wormed his way backward, gulping with relief as he reached the cooler air near the tunnel's mouth. A few more wriggles, and his knee struck something that crushed flabbily under the pressure. Across one hand dragged a fat, rough

body, paused and sent a tingle of pain up his forearm as he shook it off with a jerk. The spider army had returned. Through the endless hours of that second night of horror John Mather clung to two things with the desperation of a wave-buffed man whose arm is crooked across a slippery, floating spar: the knowledge that daylight would bring relief from his tormentors, and the hope that before another evening drove them scurrying back to shelter he would have won his way through the cave wall. Every atom of will power, every drop of that fine essence of determination which some men call upon to carry them against impossible odds he threw into the mental struggle, knowing that to lose sight of his goal would mean gibbering madness.

And in the end he won. Taut and quivering as a plucked string, he sensed rather than saw that the crawling hosts were gone.

"Now!" he rasped, the sound of his own voice grating across his nerves. "Now you dig."

He hurled himself savagely into the work, slashing and tugging at the hard-packed earth and stone opposite the mass of débris he had scooped out the day before. His knife wedged between two rocks and the blade snapped short off as he tried to extricate it. He cursed chokingly and hacked away with the haft, pitifully futile by comparison.

"Got to make it!" he muttered. "Got to make it to-day! I'll go crazy—*crazy*, I tell you!"

Inch by inch, a foot, two feet, three, he won ahead through the darkness, driving his battered hands without mercy. Out there somewhere beyond that stubborn, unseen barrier against which he pressed were fresh air and the sane, unhampered sweep of God's world. Behind, unspeakable gloom and torture more horrible than death. He must, he must keep going!

It was nearly noon when he stopped from sheer inability to do more and slithered back into the cave for a few minutes' rest. For a moment he thought night was coming on, so dark was it as he emerged from the tunnel, but as he glanced up at the opening above his head he saw that the shadows came from masses of blue-black clouds that swirled together ominously and dropped lower even as he watched. A dull pulsing shook the air, as of huge drums thudding afar off. Lightning

ripped across the clouds, so close that Mather heard its white-hot crackle an instant before the smash of the thunder beat against his brain. He threw an arm across his face to shut out the flash and what it revealed—thousands of noisome, hairy beasts that came scuttling on fat legs through the opening to take refuge from the storm.

Then it rained. The heavens opened and crashed down. A torrent of mud and water poured through the cave roof, ripping the opening to twice its former size. Like a huge bucket the cave caught and held the flood. Momentarily the water rose—to Mather's ankles, his knees, his waist. The spiders struggled in it, dropping from walls and roof by dozens. They swarmed over him horribly as they fought with each other for safety on his body and head. He tried to brush them off, to drown them by sousing himself under the cascade that spilled down from above, but they clung to him like leeches.

The water was up to his chest, now. Presently he was swimming, his head a mass of spiders that thickened by the minute and nearly suffocated him. For an age he struggled, growing weaker and weaker, knowing that in the end he must sink under that chaotic mass. The thought of it nerved him to a few more feeble strokes, a final effort to rid his head of the clammy bodies. Then, miraculously, a clatter and splash of falling rocks and earth, a sucking sound as from a giant sluice pipe suddenly cleared, and his feet touched bottom.

He staggered blindly, trying to gain his balance on the uneven rocks. With arms arched he crushed and rubbed his head free of its loathsome blanket and saw that the water was but waist deep and falling rapidly. Through the lightening darkness he could make out the whirlpool which told where, at the end of the tunnel he had been digging, the wall had given way before the pressure from within. Even as he looked the last of the water swashed out, and stooping down, he caught a glimpse of daylight. On hands and knees he crept through the opening and emerged to the free sweep of the hills, soft and dripping and peaceful against the background of the retreating storm.

For minutes he lay there, a sodden, shaken figure, looking out across that far-flung view with hollow eyes from which

the stare of horror slowly faded. Then he got to his knees, his feet, and drew a great, shuddering breath. His eyes dropped to the slope immediately before him, strewn with scores of drowned spiders.

"Well," he said shakily, "it looks as though there are enough here for all the museums in the world. I'll make a good haul while I'm about it."

With swollen, bruised hands, he began gathering up the draggled bodies and piling them beside a rock.

THE HAT OF EIGHT REFLECTIONS

BY JAMES MAHONEY

From *Century*

ONE REFLECTION

WITH his rusty, black felt hat in his hand and oblivious of passers-by, Ventrillon stooped before the shop window until the reflection of his finely chiselled young face came into place, with the forehead of the image nicely adjusted into the crown of the hat behind the clear plate glass. It was a magnificent hat, an elegant hat, a formidable hat, a hat which was all there was of chic, a genuine, glistening stove-pipe hat, a *véritable chapeau à huit reflets*—an authentic hat of eight reflections—and the Ventrillon in the glass was wearing it. The effect was amazing.

“But why should it surprise me,” said Ventrillon, “when such is my present character? *C’est idiot!*”

For not only was this shabby young man contorting himself before the shop window the youngest prize winner of the spring Salon, but that afternoon he was going into society; for the first time, it is true, and into a very curious stratum of it, but society even so. Nevertheless, though he had spent the last of the three hundred francs of his prize money on an elegantly tailored costume of morning coat and striped trousers, he had expected to wear the rusty, broad-brimmed black felt he held in his hand. But as he marvelled at the effect of his reflection in the window, the hat before him became essential. It was the final touch, and it is the final touch which is vital.

And yet, once he appeared on the boulevards in such a hat,

he would never dare to face his comrades at the Closerie des Lilas again.

They were a gay company of vagabonds: Sabrin, who worshipped Ventrillon like a mild-eyed dog; Clo-clo, whose golden ringlets outside her head would have compensated fully for the complete emptiness inside it even if there had not been her childlike adoration of Sabrin; Pinettre from Marseilles, whose passionate tenor he had heard so often seizing upon the stars above the terrace of the café, r-r-rolling the r's of "Tor-rn a Sor-r-rento!" cow-eyed scarlet-mouthed Ginette, who always wept at Italian music; poor little Tric-trac, the poet, who invariably, when drunk, recited "Le moulin de mon pays," the only poem he had ever managed to have published; Olga, the husky Russian girl, who invariably, when drunk, bussed Tric-trac resoundingly with what she called "little soul kisses"; Noiraud, the wag; Hélène, the inviolate; LePaulle, whose capital P was an affectation; Margoton, who had no taste—all of them penniless and none of them disturbed by that fact. For if one of them had the price of the beer, all drank. They had made the bomb together, ah, they had made the bomb! One would not soon forget that night when they had invaded the Cabaret of the Two Armadillos and had driven the regular clients into the streets by thundering with full lungs:

"Elle ne fait que des trucs comme ça—
Elle m'aime *pas*! Elle m'aime PAS!"

pounding the tables with their beer mugs to the terrific rhythm of their music; nor yet those mad evenings when they raced arm-in-arm down the broad pavements of the Boulevard St.-Michel, startling the bourgeois and screaming with laughter.

He could conceal that damning morning coat beneath his well worn *imperméable*, but how could one conceal a hat of eight reflections and wear it? They would think that he had become a snob, they would say that his prize had mounted to his head, they would ridicule him, they would begin to misconstrue his every statement, they would take offence; for them the hat would amount to betrayal, and he knew that he would not be able to bear it.

But Ventrillon at that moment visualized himself entering the carved portals of a great house in the Avenue Victor Hugo, the whole effect of his newly bought elegance destroyed by the rusty black felt. It was indeed the final touch which was vital. "I am beginning to see," said Ventrillon, "that though they are undeniably amusing, they are all a little vulgar. It appears that my taste is improving in advance." But having spent the last franc of his prize money, in the whole wide world he possessed not a single perforated sou.

He crossed the Seine to his garret in the Rue Jacob, stripped off the clothes he wore, and carefully arrayed himself in the full splendour of his new garments. From the slim patent-leather shoes to the exquisitely tied cravat he was perfect. Then he went bareheaded into the streets.

When he reached the shop he hesitated not, but entered with an air of command.

"My hat has just blown off into the Seine," he explained to the first clerk in sight. "Show me the best silk hat you have in the shop; and quickly, or I shall be late for my appointment."

The clerk, after inquiring the head size of this elegant, bareheaded youth, produced a counterpart of the hat in the window.

Ventrillon put the hat on his head and adjusted it before a mirror.

"The fit is perfect," he said, "though I had hoped for a better quality. But—I have no time to waste. You will place it on my account." He turned to walk out of the shop.

The clerk came hurriedly, but politely, from behind the counter, and modestly touched Ventrillon's elbow.

"Then monsieur has an account here?" he inquired.

"Of course," said Ventrillon, impatiently, and with his fingertips dusted the sleeve the clerk had touched. "And have I not told you that I have an important appointment?"

The clerk adroitly interposed himself between Ventrillon and the door.

"But I do not know the name of monsieur," he persisted, always polite.

"You do not know who I am!" cried Ventrillon, as if the statement were proof positive of an utter imbecility he had already suspected.

"I am afraid not, sir," faltered the clerk.

Then Ventrillon's voice, a huge baritone absolutely astounding from a throat so young, roared out to its full, thundering in the clerk's ears and frightening him half out of his wits:

"*I am Odillon Ventrillon, name of God!*" shouted Ventrillon.

The clerk, who for some reason he has never fully understood was under the impression that this was the family name of the Prince of Monaco or perhaps the King of Spain, and murmured, "Oh, I demand a thousand pardons, sir," has never been able to explain this affair to the complete satisfaction of the proprietor.

For, before the clerk could recover, Ventrillon had left the shop and, having dashed impudently past the ticket puncher, was well on his way in the Métro, wearing the hat of eight reflections. In the dark tunnel he could see his image facing him in the windows of the lighted car.

"Undoubtedly," reflected Ventrillon, adjusting his lapels. "it is the final touch which is vital."

ANOTHER REFLECTION

WHEN a handsome young man commits a murder, forges a check, or sets his heart upon a hat of eight reflections, one may well say to oneself, "It is a woman." And a woman it was; but it was Mme. Sutrin.

A work of art, upon obtaining a public success, however slight, becomes forthwith an irresistible magnet to its maker. Though every day had seen Ventrillon setting out to walk in the opposite direction, every day had found him at last somewhere in the neighbourhood of his prize-winning canvas in the Grand Palais.

It was there that he was discovered by Eugène Savillhac, an acquaintance who since his success had become his friend. In that portion of society smarter than good Savillhac was one of those hangers-on who boost their own stock by boosting the stock of others. It appeared, incredibly, that every one of the hundreds he knew was the most extraordinary person in Paris.

"Ah, there you are, *mon vieux!*" he cried. "What luck! The youngest prize winner of the spring Salon and the most

extraordinary woman in Paris are under the same roof. It is the first duty of a celebrity to be known by Madame Sutrin."

He indicated a large woman in black silk whose plain skirt, neither full enough to be picturesque nor scant enough to be fashionable, swayed like a peasant's from side to side as she waddled briskly through the crowd. Before her marriage to Timoléon Sutrin, the rich sugar industrial, she had been the beautiful Simone d'Estray of the Opéra Comique; but her beauty had been of that drastic sort which perfectly represents the triumph of feminine mind over matter, and after her marriage, with her future secure, she had comfortably allowed herself to become what nature had always intended her to be—very fat and very ugly. But she had the faculty of retaining all her old friends and quickly making new ones, and her flamboyant *hôtel* in the Avenue Victor Hugo was continually the scene of brilliant though somewhat dubious gatherings of boulevard celebrities, leavened with a scattering of those persons of real distinction who find delight in such society.

"Come, and I shall present you," said Savillhac, and darted across the space, Ventrillon unenthusiastically trailing.

Smiling benevolently, Mme. Sutrin turned to face them. Her tight black bodice was pointed like a basque, and a large plastron of jet beads was applied down its generous front from the high collar about her neck to where her skirt was gathered in at her expansive waist. The unmistakable shadow of a coming event decorated her upper lip.

"Aha," boomed Mme. Sutrin in the mighty bass which once had been a magic contralto, "and to what lady of the Opéra Comique do you want me to introduce you now?"

"Ah, madame," said Savillhac, "you deceive yourself. I have brought a young man to introduce to you. The most extraordinary young man in Paris, in fact. My friend Ventrillon, the youngest prize winner of the spring Salon." With a fine gesture he produced Ventrillon from invisibility.

Mme. Sutrin gasped as if struck in the face.

"*Bon dieu!*" she exploded at last, "Adonis!"

"Enchanted, madame," murmured Ventrillon. "I am honoured——"

"Don't waste a look like that on an old woman!" boomed Mme. Sutrin. "Young man, this world is badly arranged.

Either I should have been born twenty years later, or you twenty years earlier. You should have known me in my youth. Both of us would have profited.

"I know nothing about painting," she rumbled on, "and I do not like yours; but I like you, though your clothes are abominable. Come to my house Wednesday afternoon. It will be a dancing. Do you fox trot? But it does not matter. Smile at everybody the way you are smiling at me, and grow a moustache as soon as you can." She turned to Savillhac. "If Gabrielle sees him, his fortune is made. You know how she goes in for the young ones. But those clothes will never do. I'll wager he hasn't a sou. But make him sell his bed and buy something that wouldn't shame a cab driver." Then abruptly she shook hands with both the young men and, swinging her skirts, waddled her way.

"A droll of a type," commented Ventrillon.

"*Sacré nom de dieu!*" breathed Savillhac, staring at him aghast.

"Why—why—what is the matter?" stammered Ventrillon.

"You are invited to Madame Sutrin's on Wednesday afternoon, and you say, 'What is the matter?' It is *you* who are the droll of a type to ask it."

"But of course I shall not go."

"Then you will be an imbecile. It is the chance of your life. All Paris will be there. Does that mean nothing to you—*tout Paris?*"

Tout Paris! A definite social unit, it is a social unit without definition. Many belong, but more do not. If one goes where *tout Paris* goes, does what *tout Paris* does, says what *tout Paris* says, knows the people *tout Paris* knows, does not know the people *tout Paris* does not know, then one is of *tout Paris*. But if one is not of *tout Paris*, one can do none of these things. One does not know how. *Tout Paris* is success, it is failure, it is the heights, it is the depths, and it is always seeking a new sensation. Without laws, it is of fashion the law, and is of the greatest importance; for if the newspapers say, "*tout Paris* was there," that settles the matter. But, above all, *tout Paris* can applaud, and the applause of *tout Paris* can more quickly than anything else fill the empty pockets. The pockets of Ventrillon were usually abysmally empty, as he again remembered.

"And do you not know who is this Gabrielle of whom she spoke?" Savillhac continued. "The great Gabrielle Belletaille herself, *nom de dieu!* The most extraordinary woman in Paris. And you heard what Madame Sutrin said? If the Belletaille becomes interested in you, she will soon introduce you to everybody of any importance. Think of the marvellous portraits you can paint, and the prices you can charge! Perhaps she may even allow you to paint *her* portrait! Who knows? Then you will be in a position to refuse kings and queens."

Gabrielle Belletaille, the prima donna of the Opéra Comique, was, as everybody knew, the idol of *tout Paris*. There was nobody like her. Where she led, *tout Paris* followed. Where *tout Paris* leads, all the world follows. Ventrillon stood for a moment silent. His clear, deep eyes held a wonder such as one sees in the eyes of those who pause upon the thresholds of strange palaces.

"But," he said at last, "I shall not know what to say to her, even if I see her."

"Say anything but the name of Fanny Max," said well-posted Savillhac. "She is beginning to attract attention, and you can understand what that means to the Belletaille."

"But——" said Ventrillon again. Ruefully he looked down at his own baggy corduroys, his cracking shoes, his threadbare coat, and the rusty, black felt hat he held in his hand. Then he considered the slimly clad, gray-striped legs of the impeccable Savillhac, the glistening footgear, the smart morning coat with a gardenia in its lapel, the shining top hat. Savillhac was fashion itself, the embodiment in one person of *tout Paris*. Ventrillon reflected.

"My prize has brought me three hundred francs," he said. "Take me to your tailor. But I refuse to wear one of those hats. I should be assaulted in the Boulevard du Montparnasse."

For it was not until he had seen his image in the plate glass of the shop window that his head was completely turned.

THIRD REFLECTION

IN THE Métro station of the Étoile, Ventrillon dusted his patent-leather shoes with his pocket handkerchief, shot his cuffs, tilted the hat of eight reflections to its most killing

angle, and then sallied forth into the Avenue Victor-Hugo. Unfortunately, custom would not permit his wearing the hat in the salon of Mme. Sutrin. As he reluctantly surrendered it at the entrance his ears were assailed by an incredible noise, which increased in discordant violence as he neared the door of the salon.

The large room was crowded. The shining faces of a group of perspiring American blacks grinned with yellow teeth and rolled their white eyeballs above a variety of strange instruments that the Negroes were tormenting with wild, angular abandon of elbows and knees. To the barbarous compulsion of the bizarre rhythm a number of couples were moving about the floor, poising and posturing with the curious exotic dignity of the Parisian fox trot. In fashionable dishevelment smiling-eyed ladies sat about on chairs and ottomans, drinking tea; and miraculously tailored gentlemen of figures ranging from the concave to the convex stood balancing teacups in saucers.

The grace of his embarrassment fulfilling somehow the perfection of his garments, Ventrillon made an exquisite figure against the futurist splendour of Mme. Sutrin's flamingo and purple portières. She saw him standing overwhelmed in the doorway, uttered a hoarse little shriek of delight and, in her tight gown of magenta velvet rushed with a sort of oscillating precipitation to take his hands. Names of the mighty poured into his ears as she introduced him at random to everybody within reach. But he was not long abashed. He was never long abashed. And, besides, to any man, as a wise American has said, the consciousness that he is well dressed is a consolation greater even than the consolations of religion.

Mme. Sutrin left him to the mercies of a group watching the dancing from the end of the room opposite the jazz band.

"This noise," began Ventrillon, promptly, to a negligible lady beside him, "is it music?"

"Ah, no, monsieur," confessed the lady; "but it is the fashion."

"Then I must like it," said Ventrillon.

"One has not met you before, I believe, monsieur?" said the lady.

"I have not been a success before," said Ventrillon.

The lady laughed.

"Then you do not know anybody. I shall have to inform you. The little woman with the red hair near the door is Madame Ribot, the wife of the journalist. She has a wicked tongue; it is well to cultivate her. Her husband controls public opinion, and she controls him. The man behind her is the Minister of Public Services——"

A passing couple jostled the minister's arm and, awkwardly, attempting to save it, he dropped his teacup. Crimson even to the barren scalp of his head, he stooped to mop with his handkerchief at the spilled tea in the lap of Mme. Ribot. The little red-haired woman smiled, clenched her teeth, and bided her time.

"Madame," said Ventrillon, "I sit at your feet and learn. I had never before known that a Minister of Public Services could drop a teacup."

The lady laughed again.

"Monsieur," she said, "you are delicious. Look! The tall blonde who enters is the Belletaille——"

With a resounding metallic crash, the jazz band happened at that moment to stop short. Short of breath, the dancing couples separated. In the gap of the portières stood a lean, hawk-nosed woman in black, with a dead-white face of astonishing and fascinating ugliness. One shoulder was held higher than the other, one chalky hand rested with fingers wide-spread upon her uncorseted hip, and the other caressed at her waist the enormous bunch of scarlet amaryllis without which she was never seen. Everybody turned to look. The Belletaille, as usual, had achieved an entrance.

"'Allo evreebodee!" she cried in English, showing all her fine white teeth. "Ah, there you are, my Marianne! Kiss me! And, oh, my dear Madame Sutrin, how pleased I am to come! *C'est épatant!* A jazz band! *Bon dieu*, but it is ravishing! Aha! Théodule—*ça gaz?*" She had called the Minister of Public Services Théodule and asked him how he was in slang. "That," thought Ventrillon, "is success."

Taking for granted that everybody was overwhelmed with delight at seeing her, on she came, with a bow here and a handshake there, until in the centre of the room she halted abruptly.

"Théodule," she cried, "I forgot to tell Madame Hortense

to send up that gown this evening. Telephone her for me. And hasten, or the shop will be closed." The Minister of Public Services obeyed and left the room.

Then she turned and on she came again. With the sinuous step of the walk she had learned at the Conservatoire, on and on, smiling, smiling, her eyelids painted sky blue, her alizarin lips smiling apart like something unreal, jingle by jingle, faintly clicking her high heels on the parquetry, on and on, smiling always, came the great Gabrielle Belletaille of the Opéra Comique.

Ventrillon had never before in his life made an effort to please, and now his mind refused to work. In fact, it was scattered into tiny little bits all over the salon of Mme. Sutrin. "What a marvellous subject to paint!" was the only idea his devastated brain could hold. He could do naught but stare at the extraordinary creature and breathe with difficulty. She was almost upon him.

Now she was speaking to him in that golden voice, a single intonation of which could break a thousand hearts, and was extending one of those chalk-white hands, a single gesture of which could from a thousand bodies draw a thousand souls.

"And this," she was saying, "must be the Adonis of whom Madame Sutrin spoke."

Ventrillon grasped his impudence and yearned for his breath and his voice; but everything he could conceive was either too long or too obvious, and with every fraction of a second it was swiftly becoming too late. One of those terrible tea-silences had fallen when nobody can think of anything more to say.

"Ah, Madame Venus," he heard his voice stammer at last, resounding in his ears above the tinkle of teaspoons, as if he had been shouting, "n-n-not Adonis; for that f-foolish Adonis ran away!"

He saw her narrow her eyes as she looked at him, and heard the sharp intake of her breath. "Oh, my God!" thought Ventrillon, "I am ruined! I have gone too far!"

"Audacious!" she murmured. "I like audacity." She flashed all her teeth upon him and for the moment blinded him. "Come and talk to me."

She sat down, letting her long arms drift from the arms of her chair. "I hope you don't fox trot. I refuse to fox trot.

It is so vulgar. When that Fanny Max began to fox trot, the Belletaille ceased. Now tell me all about yourself. I am a person in whom one can confide. Everybody tells me everything. I am always so interested in other people. It is my character. That is why I am never bored. Only the stupid are bored. And then my life has been so interesting, so full of such strange coincidences and such fascinating episodes." Then, before allowing him one word of the telling all about himself, or herself the time to catch her breath, she shrieked the length of the room to the Minister of Public Services, who had at that moment entered again, "What did she say, Théodule?"

"She will send the gown at once," said the minister, mopping his forehead. "But what a devil of a time I had getting her! Telephonists have lost all respect. I did not remember the number and I did not want to waste the minutes, so I said to the telephonist, 'I know, my girl, it is forbidden to call without a number, but this is the Minister of Public Services who speaks.' And figure to yourselves what she says! '*Flute alors!*' she says. 'Go on with you! That is what they all say!'"

"Oh," laughed red-haired little Mme. Ribot, "that is exactly what happened to Fanny Max, the new soprano everybody is talking about, you know." Ventrillon saw Mme. Sutrin give the little woman a warning glance, and knew that Belletaille had stiffened at the mention of the name. But Mme. Ribot wore a gown which had been ruined by the Minister of Public Services, and she was about to make him pay through the nose. Nothing could have stopped her. "Excepting that *she* said she was the *wife* of the Minister of Public Services; and the telephone girl said——"

Mme. Sutrin, having not the vaguest idea what that telephone girl had said, but knowing Mme. Ribot's tongue only too well, made a desperate gesture to the leader of the jazz band, hoping to drown it in cacophony. The Negro had gone out for a drink. Mme. Sutrin subsided hopelessly.

"The telephone girl said," Mme. Ribot continued calmly and deliberately—"she said, 'Oh, the pig! *He has deceived me!*'"

The minister went a violent shade of royal purple.

"And that very day," the shameless red-haired little crea-

ture went on, "Fanny Max went to the telephone bureau with a riding whip, and it required six men to eject her. Ministers of public services must be fascinating." She looked up wickedly at the minister, who looked down at her in turn as if he would have liked to bite her. She was obtaining royal indemnities for her gown.

"Oh, spare me!" cried the Belletaille. "I suffocate! All one hears is Fanny Max! Fanny Max! Fanny Max! The newspapers are full of her. Why people will discuss such a creature I cannot understand. Such vulgarity! It makes me ill. And she will do anything for notoriety. I abhor notoriety myself. I loathe notoriety. And voice? It is like the screech of a rusty hinge. Really, Madame Sutrin, if we are to have nothing but Fanny Max——"

"I assure you, madame," said the minister to Mme. Ribot, striving to keep his rage from his voice, "that I have not the honour of knowing Mademoiselle Max——"

"Oh," she cried quickly, "never fear! Your wife will not hear it from *me*."

"Ugh!" said the Belletaille to Ventrillon, "it continues! It is disgusting! It is unspeakable! It is——"

"Mademoiselle," interrupted Ventrillon, "why speak of her? She exists only to be ignored by you."

The Belletaille gave him her grateful full face. "I knew it the moment I saw you," she declared. "You are a mystic, and I think mysticism is so fascinating. You have the eyes. I am a mystic myself. Everybody notices it. Sometimes I think we mystics alone know the true soul of things. What a truth that is, 'She exists only to be ignored by me!' You are a painter, aren't you? It is these young ones, these young mystics, who do the great things. Why do you not paint my portrait?"

Ventrillon gulped.

"I dared not ask it," he said.

"Then that is settled. We shall begin to-morrow afternoon. But come, take me to my car. It is evident that these surroundings are not for us. Ah, Madame Sutrin," she said sweetly as she took her hostess's hand, "it has been *so* interesting! One finds so many people at your house one would never dream of meeting anywhere else."

When she passed the minister, Ventrillon heard her hiss

something into his face. It sounded extraordinarily like, "Never speak to me again!" But Ventrillon was never sure of this, for the jazz band had begun anew. Nevertheless, he distinctly saw little Mme. Ribot look up from under her red hair to observe this brief passage, and then down to contemplate a large wet stain on her satin skirt with a smile of enormous satisfaction.

"After all," reflected Ventrillon, "the great are all ridiculous. It is easier than I had thought."

FOURTH REFLECTION

AT THE curb Ventrillon handed the Belletaille into her limousine.

"Till to-morrow," she said graciously as he stood there bowing, with the hat of eight reflections in his hand. The car, purring, was about to move off, but she signalled the driver with a vibratory gesture of both her long white hands, and then tore with them at the vivid bouquet at her waist. She leaned from the car and thrust a scarlet amaryllis into Ventrillon's buttonhole. "It is my flower," she said, "the guaranty of our bargain."

As the car rolled silently from the curb into the traffic, he raised the lapel of his coat and gallantly pressed his lips to the flaming lily. He saw her smile with all her teeth and wave her hand.

"Undoubtedly," he said to himself as he strolled leisurely on down the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, "it is because I happened to be designed by nature to wear a hat of eight reflections."

His recent success ran in his blood like champagne. The scarlet badge of it was brave in his buttonhole, and if he had been wearing his old black felt and strolling down the Boulevard St.-Michel, he would have sung. But such behaviour was not for the man he had become. Neither was the company at the Closerie des Lilas.

In the Champs-Élysées he passed his good old friend Sabrin, who was promenading Clo-clo on his arm. Clo-clo shook her golden ringlets and giggled.

"Regard me that, if you please!" she cried. "Ventrillon has become a bourgeois! Ventri in a hat of eight reflections!"

How shabby they looked!

Ventrillon lifted the hat of eight reflections and bowed—with a grace, and hoped nobody saw him do it. Sabrin's mild eyes deepened as if he had been a dog and Ventrillon had struck him, but Clo-clo gave a delighted little scream of amusement.

"I do not think," reflected Ventrillon, his ears blazing as he walked on, "that I shall frequent the Closerie des Lilas any more."

As that was the only place in Paris where might be found a friend to buy him a dinner, and the reason for his walking the long distance from the Étoile to the Rue Jacob was that he had not even the price of a Métro ticket, Ventrillon went to bed early that night, imploring sleep to quiet his hunger.

FIFTH REFLECTION

IF IT had not been for the sandwiches the Belletaille served with her tea and the suppers to which she had him invited, Ventrillon might have starved. But in the smart company at those suppers in fashionable restaurants he had begun to wonder how he had ever been able to endure the shabbiness of the Closerie des Lilas. And every day he could glimpse his image in the shop windows as he wore the hat of eight reflections along the boulevards to the doorway of the greatest singer in Paris.

She had arranged with Volland for a public exhibition of the portrait in his celebrated galleries on the day after it was finished. Volland well knew that the portrait of such a woman could not fail to bring *tout Paris* in crowds to his doors. After the *cachet* of a commission from the Belletaille and an exhibition at Volland's, other commissions would begin to pour in to Ventrillon, and complete success would follow rapidly. He who now wore a hat of eight reflections with bravado could then wear it with authority. Ventrillon would be a personage of *tout Paris*. Cannot one well bear one's hunger for that?

Enthroned in a tall-backed Spanish chair draped with cloth of gold, the Belletaille sat in emerald green and all her make-up. She insisted upon the make-up.

"Without it," she said, "the portrait would not be decent. You might as well paint me in the nude."

Ventrillon worked in rapt absorption. He was doing the

most brilliant bit of painting he had ever done, and this youth with the bright face of an archangel could paint like the devil himself. "It is my chance," he said to himself as the composition took form on the canvas with which the Belletaille had supplied him, "and I am going to startle the natives."

She refused to look at the portrait.

"The Belletaille is beautiful," she said, "and an unfinished painting is not. I shall wait until it is hung in a good light at Volland's."

During the *repos* she would sing to him, or feed him with sandwiches and tea. The number of sandwiches he ate astonished and delighted her. "He is a true original," she thought. "They always eat like that. Besides, he has such nice eyes."

She sang for him, without accompaniment, songs which she said she reserved from the public for her dearest friends alone. It was a curious collection of unknown things: strange, wild songs of the Sicilian peasants, weird, lonesome songs of Siberian slaves; and sad, earthy songs from the Hebrides, all unwritten, and passed down by tradition.

"These songs are old; God knows how old," she would say. "They are ageless, cosmic things. That is why they are so amusing."

"One must confess," thought Ventrillon, "that it is better than hearing Pinettre squeal 'O Sole mio!' at the Closerie. And to think that I am hearing it all free! Evidently I was born for this."

They worked in the music room, and whenever she sang she opened the windows, all of which faced the street.

"It is for my children," she would say, "the people of Paris. Sometimes they gather in crowds beneath my windows, and it is touching to hear their applause. You will not envy them the crumbs of your feast."

On the last day Ventrillon placed a slender high light down the length of the nose, and heightened the green reflection of her gown under the curve of the chin. With these two strokes the portrait sprang into solidity and completion. Ventrillon stood back, astonished.

"*Nom de dieu!*" he swore, completely forgetting how far he had risen out of the atmosphere of the Closerie des Lilas. "I shall not only startle the natives, but, *ma foi*, I have startled myself!"

"Is it really like that!" cried the Belletaille, eagerly, and ran to the easel. But she restrained herself, covering her eyes with her hands. "No, I shall not look! My children must see me when I look upon it for the first time at Volland's. I must give them that privilege. But I know that you have done me a great portrait. I said at the beginning that you had the eyes. I shall sing for you. I shall sing for you a song I almost never sing. It was written for me by Rimsky-Korsakof himself. Even Rimsky had no copy. 'It is for you alone,' he said to me; but, my friend, I shall sing it for you!" She opened the windows, and went to stand in the curve of her piano.

"Ah," she said, "but this song is *bitter*! Bitter, bitter. You will hear how bitter it is." She thrust one bony knee forward, and clasped her long thin hands upon her head, crushing her hair down into her eyes. Her rouged lips taut, she sang through her teeth, and her eyes became malignant slits under her hair. Slowly, in the deepest, the most troubling tones of all her extraordinary range, she began:

"Tr-r-r-r-a.....la! La!
 Tr-r-r-r-a.....la! La!
 I will not allow my heart to br-reak!
 Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la!"

She stopped.

"Now, do you hear? Is it not *bitter*? Is there anything else so bitter in all the world? But wait until you hear the A in altissimo at the end! That is the bitterest of all. I give it my full voice, and it is terrible. You will never hear anything like it as long as you live. Never! Listen!

"Her lamplight shines upon his face, Tra-la-la!
 His mouth is hot against her throat, Tra-la-la!
 Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! I do not care! Tr-r-r-r-a-la-la!
 Tra!—La!—LA!"

Her full voice, loud, hard, and colourless, cut the last syllable out of its shrill heights like an ominous, sharp-edged knife. Shiver followed shiver down Ventrillon's spine. He sat spellbound. When she sang she was truly great.

Outside the windows rose a burst of applause from a crowd which had gathered in the street.

"Listen!" cried the Belletaille, shaking her widespread, long white fingers above her head with joy. "My children!" She darted to a window.

As she stood in the window, holding the draperies apart with her hands, the radiance upon her face flickered and died. Her chin thrust steadily forward from between her thin shoulders, and the cords of her neck stood out like wires under her skin.

"Ah-h-h-h!" she gasped, hoarse with rage, "the cow! the camel! the pig! the poiasse! The—the—agh-h-h-h-h-h!" She could not think of words terrible or scorching enough to soothe the hot desire of her throat for exacerbation. Ventrillon felt like stopping his ears against what she would say next. "The—the *species of indelicate!*" she cried at last, and subsided, thwarted by the French language.

Ventrillon went to her side and looked out. One side of the street was packed with a mass of excited people, gesticulating, laughing, applauding. The other was deserted save for a little Dresden-china figure in a ridiculous frilly frock, with a tiny absurdity of a hat cocked down above her impertinent, tip-tilted nose, and the two huge black leopards she was promenading through the streets of Paris on a leash. The muscles of the black beasts slid like snakes beneath their sleek hides, their soft muzzles slobbered, their red tongues lolled, and their jade-green eyes shifted uneasily as they dragged the foolish little creature behind them along the pavement on her stilted heels. She was laughing with delight, and flicking them frivolously with a jewelled riding whip. It was Fanny Max.

Four *gendarmes* stood in the street, consulting in whispers. The one with the longest moustache took his courage in his hands and advanced with his chest out. The others gallantly followed. The crowd cheered again. Fanny Max touched her beasts toward the *gendarmes*. One leopard snarled. The *gendarmes* ignominiously fell back. Fanny Max laughed a silvery little "ha! ha!" and continued her triumphant progress. The crowd cheered wildly and howled with delight. The Belletaille burst into wild tears.

"T-to think," she sobbed, "that she would have the impudence to come *here!* In *my* street! She does it purposely! I *know* she does it purposely. Oh, but she is vulgar! And

her notoriety! How it is disgusting! How I ab-b-bominate n-n-notoriety!"

Suddenly the Belletaille straightened. She turned to clutch both Ventrillon's arms with hands like steel fetters.

"Tell me," she demanded hungrily, "it is true that this portrait is great, is it not? It is something incredible, it is an amazing portrait, it is true that it will startle them, is it not?"

"Mademoiselle," said Ventrillon, "have I not said that it startles even me?"

"Ah," murmured the Belletaille, reassured, "then to-morrow! To-morrow! I will not look. I could not recapture the emotion. I must give them that emotion to-morrow! To-morrow at Volland's! Let me kiss you upon your forehead—like a mother."

Ventrillon had not fully realized that no more than a single day lay between him and his triumph. Thus far, to *tout Paris*, he had been only a protégé of the Belletaille. That in itself was no small distinction. But within twenty-four hours, to-morrow, to-morrow at Volland's, he would be Ventrillon, the most celebrated portrait-painter in Paris. As the Belletaille pressed her painted lips to his forehead, the remunerative applause of *tout Paris* already resounded in his youthful ears. His heart began to beat faster, and his blood throbbed in his temples.

"To-morrow!" he said, with eyes like stars. "To-morrow at Volland's!"

SIXTH REFLECTION

VENTRILLON brushed the hat of eight reflections until it shone again. He had eaten no luncheon, and was compelled to walk all the way, but he had become accustomed to both these facts. Besides, from under the gay awnings of the cafés along the boulevards people pointed him out to one another as he passed, and that was a compensation. As he neared the doorway of Volland's his heart was beginning to swell in his chest, and his head was growing dizzy beneath the refulgent hat.

To the point of discomfort the great exhibition salon was packed with *tout Paris*. Volland shoved his way about amid richly dressed shoulders, beaming upon them with

his little pig-like eyes, and tugging at his goatee with joy. Luminous with electric light, and the only ornament of the barren gray expanse of his walls, the portrait dominated the hall. It was a tremendous success. Not only was it the portrait of the most conspicuous figure in Paris, but the brilliancy of colour and design was sensational. On every hand one heard: "Superb! Magnificent! One expects her to speak!" The crowd, already too closely pressed, increased, but nobody left the salon; for *tout Paris* was waiting for a still greater sensation. The morning papers had announced that the Belletaille would arrive that afternoon to look upon her portrait for the first time. The Belletaille had seen to that.

A new enthusiasm developed near the door and spread rapidly through the entire assembly. "It is she herself!" they whispered, and made way for her. It was the Belletaille. She was entering.

She advanced to within a few yards of the portrait and halted for a magnificent moment, confronting her painted self.

A young girl whispered excitedly:

"It is exactly like her! One knows not which is which!" Then she gave a little frightened shriek and shrank back into the crowd, for the Belletaille had turned on her like an angry tigress.

It is a curious fact that every one of us carries in his secret heart an image of himself totally different from the person that others see. The hardened portrait painter strives to approximate that image. But the portrait which Ventrillon, the novice, had painted was more like the Belletaille than was the Belletaille herself. For that great lady was, in every moment of her life, hard at work being something else. Perhaps that is the true cause of what followed, and perhaps it is not.

She collected herself. Opening her vanity case with splendid quick movements of those famous chalk-white hands, she took out a little ivory-handled manicure implement to do with it a thing for which it had not been designed.

She advanced upon the portrait, and with the gesture that she had until that moment reserved for slaying the baritone, slashed the tiny knife through and through the canvas

until it dangled from the frame in twisting, slattern shreds. Then she turned to face her awestruck audience.

"The Belletaille is beautiful!" she cried in a sonorous middle voice. "None but the hand of time shall dare to deface her!"

Whereupon, with the magnificent walk of her second act of "Tosca," she strode toward the door. As she reached it, Ventrillon was entering, his young cheeks hot, and his eyes shining with elated expectancy.

Those who saw the ensuing event were to boast of it afterward, and those who had not seen it were to pretend that they had.

"Pig!" she cried full in his face, and swinging high her parasol, broke it over the hat of eight reflections. Carrying the remains of the parasol with her, she stalked, always magnificent, into the street.

Vaguely, Ventrillon removed the ruin from his head, and stared at it, stupefied. The crowd was wild with restrained excitement, but he heard not their whispers, or even their sudden, suppressed little outbursts of high-strung laughter. The portrait was destroyed. The Belletaille hated him. She had made him ridiculous. *Tout Paris* would reject him. There were now no future commissions on which to count. He was hungry, he had not a sou, and even the hat of eight reflections was a wreck in his hand.

Ventrillon reflected. This was his to-morrow, his to-morrow at Volland's.

SEVENTH REFLECTION

BUT certain fierce and earnest words whispered in his ear with excited persistency began at last to penetrate the vacuum of his deadened brain. Puzzled, he turned to face the speaker.

A thin, blond young man with white eyelashes was begging anxiously:

"I'll give you a hundred francs for that hat! I'll give you two hundred! I'll give you five hundred——"

Ventrillon blinked. Then his brain cleared, as does the atmosphere with lightning.

"No!" he thundered in a voice which filled the room. "*Nom de dieu!* No!" And Ventrillon was himself again.

"A chair!" he shouted. "Somebody find me a chair!"

Nobody knew what was going to happen next, but everybody was ready and delighted to do anything which might promote its happening. From somewhere a chair was passed over the heads of the crowd. Ventrillon mounted upon it.

For a moment he paused. The beauty of his young face and the verve of his pose commanded a spontaneous burst of applause; but as he opened his mouth to speak, the noise died quickly into breathless silence.

"*Messieurs et 'dames*," he cried, "Regard me this hat! There is none other like it. Never has such a thing happened before, and never will it happen again. Here is the unique hat crushed by the umbrella of the great Belletaille, and merely to own it is to render yourself famous. Now attend to this extraordinary fact! I, Odillon Ventrillon, stand here upon this chair, willing to part with this treasure. It is incredible, but, *messieurs et 'dames*, how much am I bid?"

This turn of affairs was not banal; it was not at all banal. And it was perfectly true that the shapeless hat which Ventrillon was offering was already historic. It was on a par with the shoes of Catherine de' Medici in the Musée de Cluny. The highest bidder would be the envied of *tout Paris*.

"Six hundred francs," piped the tenor of the blond youth, breaking the silence.

"A thousand francs," cried an extravagantly dressed South American, enjoying himself hugely. There was a burst of applause.

"Ah, no, monsieur," regretted Ventrillon; "there will be higher bids than that."

"Two thousand," abruptly announced an ambitious lady, wearing pink pearls, from the midst of a group of her three daughters dressed exactly alike in yellow cotton.

"Only *two thousand francs!*" shouted Ventrillon. "Madame, you do yourself the injustice of underestimating its value."

"Two thousand, five hundred," recklessly screamed the blond youth. The ambitious lady turned pale.

"O *Maman*," cried the eldest of her three daughters, "bid again! We are so rich, and he is so beautiful!"

"Yes, *Maman!*" urged the other two, breathlessly. A ripple of amusement spread through the crowd.

"Two thousand, five hundred, and seventy-five," announced that lady with excessive poise, and switched a superior smile over the entire assembly.

But the bidding became general, and little by little the price went up. The hat was now the sensation of Paris; every franc bid increased the sensation; and *tout Paris*, which lives on sensation, bid on. Then entered the lists a modest little gentleman with a pince-nez, a *nouveau riche* of the war, who felt himself intruding wherever he went. His timid voice becoming weaker with every increase until at last it was only a whisper, he began persistently overtopping every bid made.

"Four thousand, forty-five," bid the blond youth.

"Four thousand, fifty," bid the gentleman in the pince-nez.

"Four thousand, fifty-five," bid the lady in pearls.

"Four thousand, sixty," bid the gentleman in the pince-nez, almost automatically.

The lady in pearls set her jaw.

"Four thousand, sixty-one," she pronounced grimly.

The blond youth mopped his overheated brow and shot his bolt.

"Four thousand, *eighty!*" and, immediately over-bid by the little gentleman in the pince-nez, rushed frantically from the room. Another bid in a voice without identity.

"Five thousand miserable little francs!" thundered Ventrillon, scornfully. "And the rate of exchange, what it is? *Bon dieu!* It is an insult to Mademoiselle Belletaille!"

But the sum was already beyond even reason of unreason; it was as if a cold wind had blown into the room. Ventrillon became sensitive to the situation.

"Five thousand, five hundred," suddenly whispered the little gentleman in the pince-nez.

"Five thousand, five hundred," shouted Ventrillon, quickly. "Going, going——" For a moment there was dead silence.

"O *Maman,*" excitedly cried the eldest daughter of the lady in pearls, "is it too late?"

"*Chut!*" hissed the mother, pinching her daughter's arm until she squealed.

"Gone," thundered Ventrillon, with finality—"gone to the dignified monsieur in the pince-nez."

That little man advanced conspicuously to take possession. The crowd cheered wildly. Volland made his way in through the uproar.

"Of course, my friend," he said genially, rubbing his hands before the chair of Ventrillon, "you will not forget my commission. A hat is not art, to be sure, but I am accustomed to 10 per cent. on sales made in my galleries."

Ventrillon, with an air, peeled off five hundred-franc notes and one fifty from the huge packet the dignified little monsieur with the pince-nez had produced from his pockets, and presented them to Volland.

He who was accustomed to wearing a hat of eight reflections went bareheaded that evening to his garret.

"But," reflected Ventrillon, "one *never* wears a hat to eat. Politeness forbids." And that night he would dine extravagantly.

EIGHTH REFLECTION

AT NOON the next day Ventrillon woke from the long slumber of the well fed to a nervous knocking at his door.

"Who is there?" he roared angrily.

"*Chut! Chut!* But it is I," loudly whispered the awed voice of the concierge. "There is a lady below——"

"Tell her I cannot see her."

"*But*, monsieur, she *says* that she is the great Mademoiselle Belletaille of the Opéra Comique."

Ventrillon started in alarm. Perhaps that astonishing woman had come with a gun.

"Tell her I cannot see her."

"But, monsieur, she resembles precisely her photographs in 'Excelsior'——"

"I don't care whose photographs she resembles——" But he stopped short, for he heard the footsteps of the Belletaille herself running up the stairs.

Ventrillon leaped from his bed, and in his bare legs and shirt flung himself against the door.

"Open your door to me!" cried the ecstatic voice of the Belletaille. "Have you seen the morning papers? You cannot refuse me the pleasure of grasping your hand! The

name of that Fanny Max does not appear. There was no room for it. She had not even the distinction of being among those present."

"But, mademoiselle," protested Ventrillon, "I cannot see you."

"*Tout Paris* is wild with the news," the Belletaille rushed on; "even your head-size appears in the papers. It was a clever idea of me to destroy that portrait, was it not? Even as I plunged it into my own likeness, I felt that I plunged my little knife into the heart of that creature. But you have surpassed me. It was a stroke of genius. And what an advertisement for my American tour! I must kiss you on both your cheeks——"

"But, mademoiselle," cried Ventrillon, in agony. "I am not dressed. Would you have me receive you in my shirt?"

"Then open your door a little way. All the world will want to know you now; but can you not come to me this afternoon? We must begin another portrait. Open it only a little way! Permit me to give you the present I have brought you."

Ventrillon allowed her to intrude a large bandbox through the gap of the partly opened door. When she had gone, he examined it, gingerly; he wondered if she had handed him an infernal machine. He had heard of such things, and could not trust her honeyed words.

He placed it on his table, and opened it by cautiously cutting away pieces of its sides with his pocket-knife. When all the cardboard had been cut away, there stood upon his table, crown-side down, and filled with scarlet amaryllis, a hat, a magnificent hat, an elegant hat, a formidable hat, a hat which was all there was of chic, a genuine glistening stove-pipe hat, an authentic hat of eight reflections.

Ventrillon stared. It was really true that he was higher in the favour of the Belletaille than ever. He was probably the most talked-of person in Paris. He could that afternoon begin another portrait, and a greater celebrity than he had ever hoped for was within his grasp. There was even before him on his table a shining hat of eight reflections in which to walk before the admiring eyes of *tout Paris*.

Now the concierge, who, fascinated, had remained behind

to peek in at the crack of the door, saw a strange thing. When she reported it eagerly to him that evening, her worthy spouse remarked that now he knew what had become of that bottle of *eau-de-vie* his uncle had sent up from the country, and he was not a man to be taken in by a woman's lies, even when she was sober.

Slinging its contents of scarlet amaryllis about the floor, Ventrillon snatched the hat from the table, placed it accurately in the seat of his chair, and sat upon it.

"It is curious, old fellow," he reflected aloud, without rising from the inchoate mass it had become—"it is curious how strange one always feels when one discovers that one has been human. But to-night you and I—*you* and *I* are going together to the Closerie des Lilas. May the francs in my pocket persuade our friends to be merciful!"

So far as the concierge could ascertain, he was addressing a rusty, broad-brimmed black felt hat which hung shapeless from a nail on the opposite wall.

Which, of course, was absurd.

HOME-BREW

By GRACE SARTWELL MASON

From Saturday Evening Post

OF COURSE, they're all dears, my family," said Alyse; "but as fiction material there is nothing to them; no drama, you know; no colour; just nice, ordinary, unimaginative dears. They're utterly unstimulating. That's why I can't live at home, and create. They don't understand it, poor dears; but what could I possibly find to write about at home?"

She crushed down upon her hair, with its Russian bob, a sad-coloured hat of hand-woven stuff, and locked the door of a somewhat crumbly room over the Rossetti Hand-Loom Shop, where she worked half time for a half living. A second-hand typewriter accounted for the other half; or, to be quite truthful, for a fraction of the other half. For her father, plain George Todd, helped out when the typewriter failed to provide.

She then betook herself on somewhat reluctant feet to the nearest Subway. For this was her evening at home with her unstimulating family; and though she was fond of them all, her predominating feeling for them was a mixture of amusement, tender tolerance, and boredom. Moreover, they lived in Harlem, which was a deplorable wilderness, utterly lacking in atmosphere and a long, long way from the neighbourhood of the hand-loom shop.

In the Subway, miraculously impelled through the bowels of the earth, Alyse—or Alice, as she had been christened—refrained from looking at the faces opposite her. The Subway does something curious to faces. It seems to drain all life out of them; it strips from them their defensive masks and exposes the deep and expressive scars of existence. A secret

and hidden soul comes out in each Subway face. But Alyse averted her eyes.

"Dear me," she sighed, "how dull they are! Isn't there any beauty left in the world?"

Her father and his chum, Wally, were just ahead of her as she came up from the Subway depths. They were wending their way to their respective homes, having come up from downtown together, as was their invariable custom. Alyse gazed at their middle-aged backs without seeing anything unusual about them. Just two plodding men, getting tubby about the waist, with evening papers under their arms, walking along, not saying much. But when they reached George Todd's door, they would look at each other, and the passer-by might well have stopped and taken off his hat, as before something rare and soul-satisfying. For here was perfect peace in friendship.

But all they said was: "S'long. See you to-night, ol' hoss." Or, "See you t'morrow mornin', Georgie."

Alyse had heard the tale of her father's miraculous re-union with Wallie so many times that it meant nothing to her. It seemed that as boys they had lived within two doors of each other in a small New England town, and they had been inseparable. First thing in the morning and last thing at night they were whistling outside each other's windows; they owned a dog in common; and when George had scarlet fever, Wally nearly died from anxiety. Then, at sixteen, life had borne them in different directions. Wally drifted finally to Alaska and George got a job in New York. For a time they corresponded, but after a while letters began to come back to George marked Not Found, and then in a roundabout way he heard of Wally's death.

Although George Todd was happily married, with a growing family, he admitted that the world would never seem quite the same to him with Wally out of it. Then came the happening that convinced him there are mysterious and unexplainable things in the world, say what you like. He was coming home from work one night, walking from the Subway rather more slowly than usual and enjoying the spring twilight, when in some strange way his heart stirred. He remembered how on evenings such as this he and Wally used to play a game in which one tossed a ball over the house to the other and gave a

peculiar call. The middle-aged George declared that all of a sudden he could hear this call, and wanting to fix it in his memory, he endeavoured to imitate it by whistling its rather melancholy intervals.

And at his whistle a man walking in front of him suddenly whirled and stared at him. It was Wally—Wally, with a newspaper in his pocket and a bundle of shirts from the laundry under his arm. He had been living within half a block of George for two years.

When her father told this story to Alyse he always at this point gave her an affectionate poke.

"Now there's a story for you, Allie. You write up about Wally being washed out to sea and given up for dead and working his way around the world, and finally settling down in Harlem right next door to his old chum. And that about the whistle. What was it made me think of that old call?"

Alyse would explain that it was coincidence, and coincidence was the lowest form of literary life. She was patient about it, but there was nothing stimulating to her creative imagination in Wally and that come-and-find-me voice he had listened to half his life. Still less was she stimulated by her father, George Todd, owner of a feed and grain business of the most eccentric instability. He was a dear, and she loved him; but she hoped as they all sat down to supper that he wouldn't begin to joke her about her work or offer her the plot for a story.

It was a spring evening and the dining-room windows were open to the two lilac bushes which Alyse's mother had nursed for years in the narrow, sooty back yard. The room was filled with an unreal light, as if the air was full of golden pollen dust. And something else, invisible and palpitant, was in the air of the homely room, something not to be seen but only sensed. Some intense preoccupation a sympathetic eye could have noted in three of the faces around the table.

"Well, well, we're all dressed up to-night," said George Todd, unfolding his napkin. "Look at Miggsy, Allie. Won't she knock somebody's eye out to-night?"

Alyse looked at her young sister, Mildred, aged sixteen. Mildred blushed, fidgeted, pouted entreatingly at her father. She was a thin little beauty, with a soft cloud of corn-silk hair about her face. In her red mouth desire and wistfulness

mingled. To-night her eyes were stretched and brilliant. She twitched at the table silver and appeared to have no appetite.

"Eat your spinach, dearie." Her mother's eyes brooded over her tenderly. "I thought you liked it creamed."

"I do, but—— Goodness, mother, is that clock right? I must fly!"

"But there's chocolate pudding for dessert, dear."

"Now, Miggs, finish your dinner. Why be so fidgety?"

Mildred looked in desperation from her father to her mother.

"But I don't want any dinner, please! I—I have to be there early. Please let me go now, Mother."

She danced from one foot to the other, the secret excitement in her eyes threatening to change to anger. She had spent most of the time since she came home from school that afternoon in front of her mirror, and she was now exquisitely polished, powdered, and perfumed. From under the fluff of hair over each ear an earring of blue to match her eyes dangled.

Alyse disapproved of the earrings and of the general effect of Milly to-night. She made a mental note to speak to her mother about letting the child go out so many evenings. But beyond the earrings and the general overstrung and overdressed effect she did not penetrate. She made no attempt to interpret the secret excitement in her young sister's eyes. The affairs of a girl of sixteen were too inane and foolish to be taken seriously.

At the table when Milly had gone flying up the stairs there remained Alyse, her father and mother, Eddie, twenty-one, and Aunt Jude. Alyse glanced around the table and suppressed a sigh. The monotony of the lives of her family sometimes oppressed her. Take her mother, for instance. She seldom went outside the house except to church or to an occasional motion picture with Wally and George. All day she did housework or looked after Grandma Todd when Aunt Jude was at work. She did not have a cook because of a queer passion for feeding her family herself. But when she had them all there in front of her, ranged around the long table, and she had put on to their plates the well-cooked, savoury dishes they liked, she would sit eating little herself,

looking from one to the other with her slightly anxious, tender glances, while gradually an expression of peace and satisfaction stole into her face; and Alyse wondered what her mother was getting out of life.

Take Eddie, also. No one, except perhaps his mother in odd moments, ever got a peep-in at Eddie's thoughts. Alyse was of the opinion that he didn't have any. There had been a time when she had tried to bring Eddie out by coaxing him down to her rooms over the hand-loom shop and introducing him to some of the girls she knew. But those clever and voluble maidens had abashed Eddie unspeakably, and Alyse had let him lapse back into his own plodding life. He apparently had no imagination. Soon after he left high school he had gone to work for a seed house downtown—George Todd badly needing help that year with the family expenses—and there he still was. Alyse hadn't the slightest idea what were his amusements. Saturday and Sunday afternoons he generally disappeared, and when asked what he had been doing, he had been to a ball game or just taking a stroll around. He subscribed to a marine journal, which seemed strange reading for a packer in a seed house.

And there was Aunt Jude. Really, when you considered everything, what had Aunt Jude to live for?

Judith Todd was at that moment preparing a tray for Grandma Todd, who was having one of her faint spells and declined to come down to supper. With her long, slender fingers moving deftly, Judith made the tray inviting with the china she had bought especially for it. She had hurried her own supper so as to have plenty of time for the tray, and she moved from the table to the sideboard with the air of detached and ironic competence she sometimes wore when she was, as Alyse said, spoiling Grandma Todd. She was George Todd's younger sister, thirty-eight, a spinster with the reputation of having been in her youth very high-spirited, adventure-loving, and moreover with a streak of queerness about her. As, for instance, her ambition to be a sculptor. In those days and in the Todds' native village a girl might as becomingly have wanted to be a circus rider. It was said there had been some stormy scenes over days wasted in the attic with messy clay. But finally life itself had put a bit between her teeth—life and her mother's

well-timed heart attacks. Her father had failed in business and died, George had married early, and the brunt of taking care of her mother had fallen to Judith.

After a while she had brought her mother to George's house, which helped George out with expenses and enabled Judith to make a living for herself. It was the nature of her job that convinced Alyse there couldn't be anything in that old story about Aunt Jude's having wanted to be an artist. It was such an absurd job. She worked for one of those concerns that produce novelties—favours, table decorations, boudoir dolls—designing many of these silly fripperies, often making them with her own hands. She had remarkable hands.

If she had an ounce of talent, Alyse decided, how could Aunt Jude go on, year after year, squandering herself on these silly and often grotesque objects? Alyse felt that it would have killed her to have so degraded her talent.

But Judith actually appeared to get a certain amount of fun out of the dreadful things. She would bring home samples of her handicraft and bedeck the supper table with tiny fat dolls in wedding veils, droll birds and beasts in coloured wax, and so on. And in one of her high moods she could set the family to laughing with a single tweak at one of these grotesqueries. On these occasions a gay and malicious sparkle would come into her dark eyes, and her laugh would be high and reckless, rather like a person who has taken a stiff drink to ease up an ancient misery.

Two evenings a week she went out, no one knew where. Alyse had seen her once at the opera, leaning far out from the highest gallery, a frown between her brows, seeming to watch rather than to listen, with a wild brightness in her dark eyes. The general impression of the family was that these regular evenings away from home had something to do with her work. On these particular evenings there was always a breathless air about her. She would hasten in from the street, and as she climbed the stairs to her mother's room her face would stiffen as if for conflict. For Grandma Todd resented these evenings.

"Traipsin' off," she called it. "Lord knows where. Something will happen to you, coming home alone after ten o'clock. I don't think you'd better go out to-night, Judith.

My heart has been fluttering this afternoon. If I have to lie here worrying all evening I shall probably have a bad spell."

And then into her daughter's face would come the expression of a person swimming painfully against the tide. Love and pity had overcome her at every turn of her life, until at last she had almost nothing of herself left, except her freedom for these two evenings. As if the call of them was more imperative, even than her long habit of abnegation, she fought for them with a sort of desperation.

To-night as she arranged her mother's tray her fine hands trembled a little; she looked more than ever as if she were straining at a leash. There was an unusual colour in her face, a sort of flame, which for an instant attracted Alyse's attention. Aunt Jude, she reflected, must have been almost beautiful when she was younger, before the expression of half-defiant endurance came into her face. Her dark hair was still lovely, with its blue-black shadows. Over her brow was a white lock, which she took no pains to conceal. She wore it rather like a defiant banner, and it went well with a certain gallant air she sometimes had.

As soon as supper was finished the family began to melt away. Wally called for George Todd and they went out. They admitted, grinning, that they were going to an express-company auction of unclaimed packages. It was one of their pet forms of entertainment, and they frequently brought home queer bundles, which they opened with shouts of amusement. Alyse thought they were dears, but rather foolish. She could not guess that when they started out of an evening arm-in-arm they became boys again and forgot that life had been a somewhat niggardly affair for them.

A moment later Miggs made a dash for the door, pulling on her long gloves. Her face was flushed and exquisite under her modish hat.

"I'll have Eddie come around to Jane's for you, Milly," her mother called to her.

A shadow of fright and annoyance came over Miggs's face.

"No, please don't, Mamma. Jane, or somebody, will come home with me. Besides, we—we may go to a movie. Don't fuss over me, Mamma. I'm not a baby."

Then she darted back into the room, caught her mother's

head in her slim arms, snuggled her little powdered nose into her neck.

"Oh, mamma, I'm all right. I'm just so full of pep to-night I'm—I'm snappy. Don't you worry, darling."

And licking her scarlet lips, glancing once more into the mirror of the old-fashioned sideboard, she was off—a humming bird caught in a mysterious gale.

Then appeared Aunt Jude, her jacket over her arm, the tray in her hands. Her dark eyes were feverishly bright, but her face looked pale and strained. Would they mind just cocking an ear now and then toward Mother's room? She would probably drop off to sleep soon, though she had made up her mind she wouldn't.

"But I must go to-night," she said, "just to-night. Perhaps after this I—won't be going out Tuesday and Thursday evenings."

She stood still, staring down at the tray she had put on the kitchen table. Then she threw up her head with the familiar defiant movement, made a sound as if of scorn at her own weakness, and shrugging herself into her old blue serge jacket, she, too, darted out into the evening.

Eddie stood by the window. He stooped to look up at the dark blue of the night sky—a gesture habitual with him—fiddled wistfully for a long moment with the shade, and then pulled it down as if resolutely shutting something out. But a moment or two later he took his hat down from the hall rack, muttered to his mother "Be back early," and slid out the front door, as if suddenly afraid of being late for something.

The house fell silent. Alyse's mother put a dark-red spread on the dining-room table and placed her darning basket under the light.

"Now this is cozy," she said happily. "We'll have time for a nice visit. Tell me about your work, dear. I've been hoping maybe you'd feel like coming home to stay as soon as you'd got some material to work on. Of course, I understand," she added humbly, "you have to have something to inspire you."

"That's exactly it, Mother. I must know interesting persons. It's very important to be stimulated. Sometimes I've thought that if I could only go to Russia or Austria or some place where there is a sense of crisis, a—*a vividness*, you

know; strife of souls. That's what I want to study. You see, Mother? And of course, here at home——"

Her mother sighed.

"I know we're all pretty ordinary, and nothing much happens, here at home."

She looked apologetic, as if she realized the family's limitations and wished she could offer something more interesting to her talented daughter. She dropped the old darning egg into the heel of a sock. The homely house was very quiet.

And a few miles farther south Milly was running breathlessly up the Subway stairs, an eager, half-frightened Proserpine coming up from the bowels of the earth into flowery meadows, into the glare of the electric flowers of Broadway.

And a few blocks north Judith Todd stood in a dark doorway and whispered: "I mustn't hope for anything. If nothing comes of to-night, I must go on. But, O God, make something come out right for me at last, at last!"

And Eddie——

At about this moment Eddie's mother was rolling a pair of his socks into a neat ball. She sighed unconsciously.

"Sometimes it seems to me," she said, "as if Eddie has never really waked up. I—I can't express it the way you would, Alice; but as if he was driving himself—dumb, you know."

"Doesn't he like his job?"

"I don't know. He never says. But sometimes he looks—— And then there's that Haskins girl. I'm afraid he's let her push him into being engaged. I wish I knew—he's so silent lately. . . . When he was a little boy he used to lie on the floor by the hour, so happy, drawing pictures of ships."

Ships! Alyse had never noticed them, but they lay like a fringe about the tall city, slowly rising and falling with the tide, lying there waiting to be unloosed to the seven seas. But Eddie knew they were there. All the miles of wharves he knew, from Sunday and evening rambles, from noon hours when he went without food to stand looking at some lovely visitor from an unknown port. And now at this moment he was making his way as fast as he could to say farewell to one that had become the very core of his heart.

More eagerly, and more swiftly than he ever had made his

way to the Haskins girl he travelled toward the North River. Just before he reached the corner beyond which he could look down upon the river he felt his heart grow cold with the fear that sometime during the day she might have slipped out to sea. It seemed to him that if she had gone he could not bear it; and yet he told himself that to-morrow night she would not be there; they had begun to ship her cargo.

But when he had rounded the corner, there were her masts against the deep blue of the night sky—five masts, the beauty! He had seen them two weeks before one night when he was leaning over the wall of Riverside Drive, and his heart had leaped. He had made his way down to the wharf alongside which the schooner lay, and stood there studying her, feasting his eyes on her. The tall cliffs of houses towered above her, but she smelled of many cargoes and of the sea. He could imagine her furled canvas slowly shaking out to the breeze, the deck tilting. The mate had come up on deck with his pipe and talked to him over the side.

Next evening Eddie was there again, and the mate invited him on board; he talked about the schooner as a man might about a wife whose very faults he loved. And Eddie had asked him questions which had been storing up in his heart since he was a boy. He could talk to this man Jennings, for they had a passion in common. Evening after evening they leaned over the deck rail or sat in the cabin, smoking and talking, and a deep friendliness developed between them.

To-night when Eddie came to the edge of the Drive he did not hurry down as usual to the wharf where the schooner was tied up, but stood looking down at her. In his brain there was a misery and a battle. They were working overtime down there, loading the last of a general cargo, and that meant they would take advantage of the first tide. To-morrow she would be gone, off to the River Plate. He shut his eyes hard and gripped the wall against which he leaned.

To-morrow he would go downtown as usual in the Subway, and all day long he would be nailing up boxes in the basement of the store, and in the evening he would go around to see Lily Haskins. Under his breath he uttered a sound between a groan and an oath. He felt bewildered when he thought of Lily. He gazed at the five masts against the sky and they were like a shining vision beside which Lily Haskins was but a

dull unreality. Was it actually true that he was going to marry, to go on all his life nailing up boxes as if they were his own coffin?

His feet carried him slowly down toward the wharf. He must say good-bye to Jennings, no matter how much he shrank from going on board the schooner again, and as he went down the long stairs he was wondering at the stupidity of his own life. Why hadn't he talked things over with someone? Perhaps someone else could have told him whether he was really obliged to marry Lily. But he guessed that he had always been dumb. Life had gone on within him, half asleep, in the dust of the packing room, until he and Jennings and the schooner became friends.

And after that he had awakened, but he was still dumb. Perhaps if years ago he had begun to talk about what he wanted to do—— But that year when he was eighteen, and making his secret plan to join the Navy, was the year Dad's business was so poor. He couldn't desert him when he was so hard pressed. Perhaps later, when Dad had got on his feet, he might have broken loose, if only he had believed in his dream; if he hadn't been afraid of being laughed at.

His thoughts went still farther back, to the days when he used to cover immense sheets of paper with pictures of ships, full-rigged, with each detail as correct as he could make it from pictures he had seen.

He remembered looking up one day from his drawing with a sudden vision in his heart and crying out, "When I grow up I'm going to be a sailor!"

And someone, he could not remember who, had laughed. For a long time they called him Yeave-Ho. The door of his heart through which this cry had gone out had closed.

If he had cared less about his dream, the door would not have closed so tightly, perhaps; or if there had been any one in his world who did not regard the sea as merely a blue blur in a geography.

Well, if a man was a sensitive fool, he had only himself to blame. He closed his lips more tightly and went on down the wharf. Two fellows passed him with bundles over their shoulders. The crew was going on board. In the light of torches the last of the cargo was being hustled on board. The light streamed upward and touched the masts; the vessel

moved slightly with the tramping of feet and the lifting of the tide. With the lights, the shouting and movement of men, the schooner seemed to rise on tiptoe, eager and expectant.

In a shaft of light stood Jennings, checking off the crew as they came aboard. Down the wharf came the captain, a man behind him carrying bags and bundles. As soon as he climbed on board, Jennings could be seen showing him a telegram, and the captain frowned. Eddie, his habitual diffidence overcoming him, shrank back into shadow, but presently when the captain had gone into the cabin, Eddie moved over to the edge of the wharf and called, "Good-bye, Mr. Jennings! Just thought I'd come down to wish you—wish you——" But before he could finish, Jennings leaped and grasped his shoulder.

"Eddie! By cricky, boy, you look good to me! Look here!" He waved the telegram under Eddie's nose and dragged him on board. "Look here, it's Providence sent you down here just now. Petersen's in hospital. We're short a hand. My boy, it's your chance! You'll never have a better one. How about it? You'd have time to get your dunnage. Let's see—tide will be right in two hours and fifteen minutes; all the time in the world. What say?"

The night reeled and rocked around Eddie.

"To-night!"

The mate drew him forward, whispering, "Look here, you know as much about a vessel now as Pete ever did. You were born for the sea, and that's the truth. This is your great chance to get your apprenticeship—good captain and a dandy vessel."

Eddie stared about him while his heart pounded. He looked down the long lines of the schooner, he heard the masts faintly creaking and whispering in the rising wind, he smelled the unforgettable smell of a ship, and he choked with longing. He thought of his mother, but not at all of Lily Haskins. Could his father do without him? Would they all think he had gone crazy? Would they laugh? And at that instant the wind ruffled the water, the smell of the sea came stealing up the river, and the deck rose under his feet, an imperceptible movement to any one not tuned to the sea. But to Eddie it was as if his heart itself turned over. His heart was like a seed, long buried in the dark and cold of the earth, which has

been pushing blindly upward and now at last sees the sun. His hand on the smooth curve of the mast tingled and drank in the feel of the ship, while into his soul there poured a new steadiness, a clean new certainty. His dumb boyhood was over and his beloved was under his hand.

Alyse yawned and her thoughts came back from her novel about Russia as her eyes fastened themselves on the chiffon stocking her mother was carefully mending.

"Really, Mother, it's ridiculous the way Mildred dresses. And ought she to go out every night? When I was sixteen I didn't want to do anything but read."

Her mother smiled and sighed.

"I wish to goodness Milly would sit down at home with a book. But she says life is so much more exciting than books. She told me the other day that she had to live her own life."

"Life!" Alyse laughed scornfully. "That baby!"

It was at about this moment and several miles farther downtown in a dancing place called Poppy Gardens that Mildred, the baby, was on the verge of learning something about life. She was also being called an infant, but in quite a different tone.

"I'd jus' soon tell the world," said Dion Delanoy, holding her closer, "that you're some little dancer, baby."

And at the half-lazy, half-insolent caress in his voice, Milly thrilled with rapture and with discomfort. But it was very queer—there seemed to be two of her. One was intoxicated with delight and wonder, and the other held herself cool and aloof and, looking on, curled her lip. Overhead in the ceiling electric bulbs were stuck like pins in a cushion. When you tilted you head back so that your cheek touched your partner's shoulder, all these lights reeled and swam after you around the room, and the floor undulated in long flat waves. When you floated through the green spotlight, Dion Delanoy's eyes, like large shoe buttons in an ordinary light, became queer and sinister. When at the other end of the room the red spotlight washed over you, his pale dusky skin with the blue tinge from shaving had a bloom like an exotic fruit, and he became beautiful; he became what she had come out to meet, a romantic hero.

And she had reached that brief, glamorous season when there must be a hero to worship or one goes hungry and thirsty. When she had seen him in a bullfighter's costume with the footlights performing their nightly miracle with him, her hunger had fed itself upon him. Jane Tremont had been almost as bad, but it was her note he had answered, and she alone whom he had invited to meet him in the Peacock Alley of a Broadway hotel. It was Fate, his choosing her and not Jane, and it could only mean that they were meant for each other.

Having only just begun to learn about life, Milly didn't suspect that the trysting spot Delanoy had chosen could be neatly overlooked from a balcony, and standing here, he could scrutinize his latest conquest and decide whether or not he cared to keep the appointment. He had been a bit taken aback by Milly's youth, but it happened to be a dull evening. And besides, in the dressing room, heavy with the odour of stale powder, Milly had used a forbidden lipstick. He could not possibly know that in spite of her desirous lips her heart was pounding with fright.

But now, since they had danced for half an hour, fright had given place to this queer mixture of emotions; elation, dizzy wonder—she, Mildred Todd, dancing with a famous dancer, or at any rate a nearly famous dancer—hadn't he had a dance practically alone, with the spotlight once directly on him?—and a curious undercurrent of vague unhappiness, as if already she had said good-bye to someone she had shrined and now had lost. And those two individualities into which she had divided, the one whose lip curled sometimes, who looked on, not happy and yet not unhappy—homesick, rather—and the other, confused, ecstatic, and silly.

"I feel funny," thought Milly, "and nothing is quite like I thought it would be."

Then the next minute she thrilled when someone behind them said, "That fella's Dion Delanoy."

They had iced drinks at a sloppy table in a room off the dancing floor. He poured something into her glass from a flask, under the table. She became dreadfully sleepy and wished she were home and in bed. Then the lights around the dancing floor grew suddenly brighter and danced, and every thing was gayer. Dion Delanoy became again a hero, and

she knew that she herself was very wicked and beautiful. The cool half of her gave her lips one final curl of scorn and retired to an immense distance. The vague ache of disillusion left her too. She saw herself engaged to Dion Delanoy, giving a theatre party in a box, and afterward taking Jane behind to meet him. He was her hero. He was marvellous. She clung tight to this thought, as if she knew that once she let it go she could not stand him.

And they wandered down to the street and into a taxicab. The drive was a flash and blur of lights, with Dion Delanoy holding her uncomfortably close. The taxicab increased her sense of wickedness, and she thought of a word she had recently added to her vocabulary—"insouciance." She was convinced that she had a great deal of it, and as for Dion Delanoy, he was magnificent with it. If only the cool and critical half of her would drop behind, and take with her the dim sense of sadness that was so oddly like homesickness.

"Wouldn't it be perfectly terrible if I should cry?" thought Milly.

The cab stopped in front of a studio building.

"Friend of mine let me have his studio," murmured Delanoy vaguely. "Let's go up and start the phonograph."

Milly hung back.

"I—I ought to go home. It's getting late."

He laughed at that, without any particular merriment in his watchful eyes.

"Aw, baby—that's what you are, baby."

There was no taunt that could have hurt Milly more deeply. She looked up at him pleadingly, when an incident, small but important, as many small incidents are, occurred. Two markedly elegant young women approached and passed, perfuming the air. They bowed and smiled at Delanoy. He swept off his hat with a gesture nicely combining hauteur and suavity. In the light from the apartment-house doorway he looked for the first time that evening as she had seen him on the stage.

"Evelyn's looking all to the good to-night," he said gazing after the two young women with a careless appraisal.

"You don't mean Evelyn Beverly, of the Follies, do you?"

"Sure," he replied, rather too quickly; "old friend of mine. She and I was dancing up here in Jack's studio last night.

Come on Don't pretend you've never been out after dark before. That kind of bluff makes me sick."

She felt a desperate necessity not to displease him, this godlike being, so handsome as he stood frowning down at her. And she would die rather than let him think her less endowed with insouciance than Evelyn Beverly. Meekly, with her lips parted childishly and her flower-blue eyes very wide, she followed him to the elevator.

In spite of Alyse's contempt for coincidence, it does happen in life. For instance, there was the sprig of lilac in the buttonhole of the Negro elevator boy. As Milly stepped out of the elevator this bit of flower, stuck so casually in a buttonhole, sent a sort of message to her brain. On the supper table at home that night there had been a sprig or two from the bush in the back yard. Her mother had always been foolish about that bush, coaxing it, feeding it, ever since Milly could remember. And now the perfume of lilac acted like a reagent in Milly's subconscious mind. As she watched Dion Delanoy searching his pockets for his key, bending over the keyhole, it was as if her vision for the first time that evening was quite clear.

And nothing can be more merciless than a young girl's scrutiny. Milly saw the ignoble back of his head, his hair sleeked back with pomade, a slight sprinkling of dandruff on his coat collar, his commonplace hand, not too clean. He smelled slightly of the barber shop and of toilet water. She disliked his necktie.

She was kept waiting only a few seconds, but in this interval a romantic hero died. She had a sudden, furious distaste for this cheap stranger, and her heart ached too. She wanted dreadfully to be at home. But she felt helpless; she couldn't think what to do next or how to get away. Delano had at last got the door open. He opened it, turned to her.

And at that instant behind a door at the end of the short hall a woman laughed low and happily.

"Why," exclaimed Milly, "that sounds exactly like Aunt Jude!"

Judith Todd, when she had left the house and her mother behind her, became as usual a thing with wings on her feet.

She flew toward the Subway entrance, her dark eyes eager, her chin outthrust, her tall figure leaning forward as if the waiting to get there was intolerable. Sometimes she took a quick and happy look up at the sky, as a girl may who is hastening to meet a lover.

At Columbus Circle she came up to the surface and walked quickly across to a certain somewhat shabby studio building. Usually she could not reach it quickly enough; but to-night she passed the door twice, and finally stepped into the shadow of another doorway to have it out with herself. She told herself that to-night was not different from any other Tuesday or Thursday night, and she was a fool to be so excited. But all day it had hung over her, a prescience that this was the most important hour of her life. She longed for it, and she dreaded it terribly. If it brought her disappointment it would be no ordinary disappointment; it would mean the death of something in her without which her life would become merely an existence—hope. To-night she realized that she had never really lost it—hope—and an undying belief in her own genius.

But to-night could kill them both, or it could turn them into strength and glory. She clenched her hands into the pockets of her old serge jacket and set her lips in their lines of endurance.

The coloured boy in the elevator smiled at her and eyed the sprig of lilac in her buttonhole. She had taken it from the supper table and completely forgotten it until this instant.

"Looks like summer's comin'," he drawled.

She held the flower out to him.

"For luck," she smiled.

Then at the top floor she went on down the short hall to the door behind which every Tuesday and Thursday night she came to life.

With her hand on the knob, she heard voices within. She shrank back. So, already it was here, the life or death of her hope, waiting there beyond the door. She had expected to have a half hour to herself, to quiet in work this sickening tremor of her heart. Well, nothing for it now but to harden herself for whatever verdict those voices in there would soon utter. She threw her head back defiantly and opened the door.

Three men were in the high, bare studio, standing about

a long table. They turned toward her at the sound of her entrance, and one of them, a tall, thin man of forty, with quiet eyes and a sensitive mouth, came quickly forward to meet her. But she looked past him toward the table on which stood ten or twelve little figures, some of them still mere lumps of clay. Not even in this moment could she keep her eyes from them, the objects into which she had poured herself in delight and in suffering.

The tall man, John Richmond, followed her glance with understanding.

"You see, I got them back safely; and these gentlemen asked to meet you."

He presented them, and at the name of one of them she flushed—Ybarra. She knew him by repute as a Fifth Avenue art dealer whose galleries were noted for the cleverest and most daring of the exhibitions. The second man stood a little without the circle of white light that beat down from overhead. He appeared to her as merely a little grizzled man, and the name, Mr. Purcell, meant nothing to her, until stepping toward the table and thus coming under the light, some feature or gesture arrested her attention sharply. She caught her breath and fixed her eyes on him in a startled stare. George Jean Purcell. She knew him now. She had seen him in his box at the opera one night. A girl sitting next to her in one of the topmost balconies had pointed him out. A fabulously rich man, and a discriminating collector. She had often longed to see the inside of the little white marble gem which was his private museum.

Something like terror invaded her. She had an impulse to gather them up in her arms, those bits of clay which were part of her, to protect them from the eyes of these two men who could command so much of the beauty of the world. She gripped the back of a chair, while a defiant glare came into her bright dark eyes.

The little grizzled man touched one of the clay figures. It was a study, a fantastic interpretation of a famous tenor in one of his most picturesque rôles.

"You knew him very well, didn't you?"

She smiled her fleeting, ironic smile.

"From the top gallery. Once I bribed an usher to let me into the dress circle."

George Jean Purcell and Ybarra, the art dealer, looked at her sharply.

"My dear young lady," cried Ybarra, "do you mean to say none of these people sat to you?"

"To me! Why should they? And, anyway," she added, "I didn't want them to sit to me. These are not portraits. They're—bits of what goes on inside of me, I suppose."

Ybarra started to speak, but Purcell held up his hand. He looked from Judith Todd to the bits of clay on the table. The tallest were perhaps fourteen inches, figures of famous men and women, of little shopgirls, of an ancient hag of a woman, of a blind man. Fantastic, gay, sinister, and pathetic, each one had its authentic breath of life. They had been done with the lightness of touch, the half-bitter whimsicality of a genius that is afraid of itself. And into them there had been poured the hunger and the rebellion of long repression.

George Jean Purcell shot a keen glance from under his gray brows at the woman who stood clutching the back of a chair, trying to keep defiance in her eyes. He noted the old serge suit, carelessly worn, the unfashionable hat; and over and beyond these details he observed the lines of endurance about her mouth, which could not obliterate its humour. He also saw the rather bitter keenness of her dark bright eyes.

"Spinster," he thought; "iron-bound sense of duty; starving for proper soil to grow in. What miracle was it that let her do these amazing things?" And aloud he said, "How did you happen to wait until now?"

She looked as if she thought the question a little stupid.

"I never had time, or a place to work in where I could do as I liked."

"You have ties, obligations?"

She smiled without bitterness.

"I have to make a living; and I have a mother with a weak heart, who can't realize I've grown up."

"You know you have genius?"

Her face became gay with a touch of impish humour.

"I know. It's God's little joke with me."

Purcell chuckled grimly.

"You're not giving anything away, young lady." He offered his hand. "I'm going to leave you with Ybarra and John. They'll tell you what I want you to do. And I

hope, for the sake of an old man who treasures beauty wherever he can find it, you will accept their advice."

Without another glance or word he walked briskly out.

The instant the door closed on him, Ybarra seized her hands with an exuberant Latin gesture.

"Congratulations, my dear young woman! I've never known old George Jean to go so far for native talent."

She looked past him appealingly at John Richmond, her face white.

"What does he mean?"

John Richmond detached Ybarra, and himself took her hands and looked into her eyes. "Judith Todd, it means the end of the long road; it means a fair chance at last. You know, don't you, that when George Jean Purcell puts in an order for an artist's work, he's got a pretty canny idea that that artist has a future? Isn't that so, Ybarra?"

"It has meant just that several times in the past."

"Very well, that's that," said John Richmond. "Now you're to finish up a certain number of those figures—yes, yes, we know you can't afford to have them cast, but Mr. Purcell will attend to that. In return you will sell him six that he chooses. I believe he gave you a check, Ybarra? Perhaps if she sees that she'll believe us."

But though they put in her hands the slip of pale-green paper with its figure which exceeded her earnings for a year in the novelty shop, she did not look at it. Instead, her burning gaze clung desperately to John Richmond's face.

"You're not fooling, are you? You wouldn't be so cruel as that, would you?"

Richmond's eyes blurred. He made a signal to Ybarra, and the dealer slipped out of the room, murmuring something about an engagement.

"Remember," he said as he went out, "one of my galleries will be ready for your exhibition in the autumn."

With the sound of the closing door, Judith Todd collapsed upon a chair. She was not the crying sort of woman; tears hurt her as they do a man; but now the floods rushed over her. All the years when she had borne the pain and the wonder of her gift alone, all the years when it had been denied, were in that flood. And John Richmond went down on his knees. He held her racked body close, murmuring his

deep sympathy and understanding. But presently, when she had grown calmer, she tried to draw herself away, looking much ashamed.

"I'm a frightful fool, letting go like this; and I haven't thanked you yet. If you hadn't lent me this studio, if you hadn't encouraged me——"

"Don't, Judith! You know—I've told you—ever since that rainy Sunday afternoon in the Museum, when I saw you prowling around the Rodin things like a hungry ghost, and finally got up courage to speak to you because your face had such longing in it—ever since then I've believed in you."

"Yes, you've believed in me," she whispered, as if the wonder of it were something she could never fathom. "The first one to believe in me."

"But more than that," he went on in a low voice. "I've loved you."

She shrank a little and put up her hand.

"No, no, that can't be so! Look at me, a shabby old maid. I know! I haven't got young nieces for nothing; and I'm considered a bit queer too. That has always been rubbed into me too. But it doesn't matter now. You don't need to think you love me, for I have so much now. A chance to work, unashamed—and your friendship. I—I shall be content with that; I don't ask more than that."

"Judith, don't you know it's a privilege to love you? Don't you know you're wonderful in your courage and strength? Don't you know you're beautiful?"

All the light and amazement there was in the world seemed to be in her enormous eyes.

"It is too much," she whispered, "to be offered love and fame all in one hour. I'm afraid. I've never been afraid before, but now I'm scared. I'm afraid of waking up."

He drew her to her feet.

"Come and look at something real and you'll know this is no dream."

Together they stood beside the long table and bent over the little figures so vital and so gay, which were the soul of Judith Todd squeezed out of her by the drab discipline of the years, turning itself at the first touch of encouragement into these vivid and mordant fragments.

"How did you do it?" he cried. "How did you get under-

neath the surface like that, as if you had stripped off the smooth skin and seen what was rioting underneath, the ridiculous and sublime fantasy of the soul?"

It was then that she laughed, low and happily.

"Because I am like that—all smooth and gray on the surface, and underneath amazing—little coloured worlds within worlds, always something dying and something else being born. No one ever is commonplace, underneath. Why, take my family—at the supper table we sit, a dull family in a narrow house in a Harlem street. But if you watch with patience and insight, you see worlds opening up behind each pair of eyes, longings, incredible dreams——"

She stopped abruptly, her eyes fixed on the door.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I thought I heard my name. Wait, let me look. Someone out there——"

She threw open the door. A sleek young man dropped his hand from the arm of a girl who sprang forward with a cry of the frankest relief, "Aunt Jude! I want to go home with you."

The socks and stockings were all darned and they lay neatly folded in a ring around the darning basket. The evening noises in the street outside were stilled, and the narrow house in the Harlem street was quietly breathing, waiting. Alyse yawned, looked at the clock and put on her sad-coloured hand-loomed hat. Another evening practically wasted. Of course, she had a sense of having done her duty, and it was nice to spend a peaceful evening with Mother. But from the point of view of literature she had got nothing out of it. Families were mostly like that, nice as something to come home to occasionally, but utterly unstimulating to the imagination.

"Mother, do you suppose Father could afford to send me to Russia——"

And just there the telephone rang. It was her father, and he told Allie to tell her mother not to be worried if he was a bit late getting home. The fact was, he chuckled, he and Wally had got arrested.

"Arrested! Father! What for?"

"Well, you see," he explained, "Wally bid on a package at

the express-company auction, and we were taking it away down a side street, sort of dark, you know, when the darned thing dropped and broke. A policeman came snooping along just at that minute and he ran us in."

"But why, why, Father?"

"I guess he thought we were bootleggers, because Wally, for a joke, kind of helped it along, and——"

"But what was in the package, father?"

"Well, that was a joke on us," said George Todd, and she could hear his appreciative chuckle over the wire. "You see, there was two dozen bottles of hair tonic in that darned package."

Alyse hung up the telephone with a disapproving face.

"You might know that if anything happened to Father it, would be something ridiculous," she sighed.

DERRICK'S RETURN

BY GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

From *Cosmopolitan*

DERRICK dreamed that Indians had captured him and had laid him face down in their camp fire and were slowly burning his head off. As a matter of fact a surgeon was working out a difficult problem in the back of Derrick's throat, and for a little while, toward the end of the operation, anesthesia had not been complete.

The operation was a success. Something that ought not to have been in Derrick's throat was now out of it, and an incorrect arrangement of this and that had been corrected. The only trouble was a slight, ever so slight bleeding which could not be stopped. The measures taken to stop it were worse than the dream about the Indians, and, still worse, they didn't stop it. The thin trickle of blood kept on trickling until the reservoirs from which it came were empty, and then the doctors—there were a good many of them now—told the woman who sobbed and carried on that her husband's sufferings were all over. They told her that Derrick was dead.

But Derrick wouldn't have admitted that. Even the bleeding and the pain of which he seemed to have died were now but vague and negligible memories. The great thing was to get out of that body which had already begun to decay, and making use of a new and perfectly delightful power of locomotion, to get as far away from it as possible. He caught up with sounds and passed them. And he discovered presently that he could move a little more quickly than light. In a crumb of time some unerring intuition told him that he had come to the Place to which some other unerring intuition had directed him.

Among the beautiful lights and shadows and colours of that Place, he learned fast. There were voices which answered his questions just as fast as he could think them. And something wonderful had happened to his memory, because it was never necessary to think the same question twice. Knowledge came to stay. To discover how very little he had ever really known about anything didn't humiliate him. It was funny. It made him laugh.

And now that he was able to perceive what insuperable obstacles there must always be between the man-mob and real knowledge of any kind, he developed a certain respect for the man-mob. It had taken them, for instance, so many millions of years to find out that the world on which they lived was not flat but round. The wonder was that they had made the discovery at all. And they had succeeded in prying into certain other secrets that they were not supposed to know—ever. As, for instance, the immortality of the soul, and how to commit race suicide.

To let the man-mob discover its own immortality had been a dreadful mistake. Everybody admitted that now. The discovery had made man take himself seriously and caused him to evolve the erroneous doctrine that the way to a happy immortality lay only through making his brief mortality and that of others as miserable as possible.

He thought a question and received this answer, only the answer was in terms of thought rather than in words:

"No, they were put on earth to be happy and to enjoy themselves. For no other reason. But for some reason or other nobody told them, and they got to taking themselves seriously. They were forced to invent all kinds of sins and bad habits so that they could gain favour by resisting them. . . . But with all respect to what you are now, you must perceive and admit what a perfect ass you were up to the time of your recent, and so called, death."

He thought another question. The answer was a negative.

"No. They will not evolve into anything better. They have stood still too long and got themselves into much too dreadful a mess. As a pack they will never learn that they were meant only to be happy and to enjoy themselves. Individuals, of course, have from time to time had this knowledge and practised it, and will, but the others won't let them

practise it. But don't worry. Man will die out, and insects will step in and succeed where he failed. Souls will continue for millions of years to come to this place, to learn what you are learning, and be happy to know that they have waked for ever from the wretched little nightmare they made for themselves on earth. And since happiness is inseparable from laughter, it will make them laugh to look back and see how religiously they side-stepped and ducked out of everything that was really worth while."

II

In the first days of some novel, beautiful, or merely exciting experience a man misses neither his friends nor his family. And it was a long time, as time is reckoned here on earth, before Derrick realized that he had parted from all his without so much as bidding any one of them good-bye.

In time, of course, they would all come to the place where he now found himself, and share with him all that delicious wealth of knowledge and clear vision the lack of which now stood between them and happiness. Here the knowing how to be happy seemed the mere *a b c* of happiness. It was the first thing you learned. You not only learned how to be happy; but you applied your easily acquired knowledge and you actually *were* happy.

But how, the earth dweller asks, can the spirit of a man, separated from his wife and children and from the friends he loves, and conscious of the separation, be happy? Very easily. It was one of Derrick's first questions, and the answer had been perfectly satisfactory.

He could always go back. He had learned that almost at once. There is no such thing as separation. If he chose to wait where he was, gathering the sweetest and delightfulest knowledge among the lovely lights and shadows and colours and perfumes, even as a man gathers flowers in a beautiful garden, in the course of time all those whom he had loved so greatly would come to him and be with him for ever. But if waiting would make him unhappy, here where no one need be unhappy, he could always go back. When? Now. Soon. Whenever he liked. Oh, it took a little time to get back; but not much. If, for instance, his wife at a given moment were about to lift her hands to her hair, and at that same

moment he made up his mind to go back to her and actually started, he would get to her before her hands had moved more than a thousandth of an inch from her lap.

How could he communicate with her? As of old, if he liked. He could be with her. She could hear his voice, on occasions, if the actinic and electrical conditions were just right. She might actually see him. And of course he would be able to see her and to hear her. There was never any trouble about that. If he wanted to be with his family *all* the time, until they in turn got ready to come here, there was nothing to prevent—absolutely nothing. But had he, in his earth life, ever wanted to be with his dear ones *all* the time? Probably not. One of these days he would probably run into Romeo and Juliet. Very likely he would find them together. They were often together; but not always. Probably, like other loving spirits, he would not wish to be with *his* family *all* the time. He would probably do as other spirits did—go and come, and go and come.

About communicating? He would probably find that plain straight talk was too strong for earth dwellers. It had been tried out on them often, and usually disastrously. It was like forcing champagne and brandy on men who had always been content with beer. Straight talk from the spirit world often produced epilepsy among earth dwellers. It was too much for them to have all at once. And then such a very little was enough to content them, and he would find it far more satisfactory to furnish them with a little—a mysterious and nicely stage-managed *little*—than with a plain-spoken straight from the shoulder *lot*. To the wise, and he was now beginning to be wise, a hint is sufficient. Suppose, his wife being at her dressing table, he were to plant himself beneath and rap out a few words in the Morse code? Let him keep on with these rappings until she called in someone to interpret them for her.

He could not only comfort her about his death and reassure her as to his general whereabouts and activities, but he could have a lot of fun with her. There is no harm in having harmless fun with those you love. It is the fear of fun, the suspicion with which it is regarded, more than any one single thing, that has given the man-pack such a miserable run for its money. By means of the Morse code, he could persuade

her to buy a ouija board. He would love that, and so would she and the children.

But Derrick kept putting off his return to the earth.

If a loving husband and father were turned loose in the finest jewellery store in the world and told to take his pick of the diamonds and rubies and pearls, as many as he could carry, he would not at once rush off to tell his loved ones of the astounding privilege that had been extended to him. He would stick to the store. He would hang about it possibly for days taking mental stock of all its precious contents. Blurring the tops of the glass show cases with his breath and staring till his eyes ached.

Derrick was in somewhat the same case. He had the impulse to rush off at once to his family to tell them of the extraordinary wisdom and mental equilibrium which were being lavished upon him; but he was restrained by the very natural wish to remain where he was until the last vestiges of earth marks had been rubbed from him.

He had been a very decent man as men go; but the amazing sense of purity which now pervaded his being was new in his experience. It was not so much a smug consciousness and conceit in personal purity as a happy negation of all that is not directly of the spirit in its most calm and lucid moments.

Here nothing soiled and nothing tired. An immense and delicious mental activity swept one past all the earthly halting places. There was no eating or drinking or love-making. There was no sleeping, and the mere fact of existence among the lights and shadows and colours was more cleansing than the most refined species of Oriental bathing.

Life here was mental. Burning curiosities and instantaneous satisfactions thereof seemed at once the aim and the end of existence. And since there can be no limit to the number and extent of the spirit's curiosities, it was obvious that there could be no limit to existence itself. And Derrick together with those spirits which had passed into the Place at the same time with his own began to have a clear understanding of humanity.

Here, for instance, all that one learned about God was fact, but there was so much to learn that heaping fact on fact, with a speed unknown on earth—even in the heaping of falsehood upon falsehood—it would take from now until eternity to

learn all about God. And this, of course, had to be the case. Since God is infinite, He can only be wholly revealed to those who, by pursuing knowledge to infinity, have acquired infinite knowledge.

The man-mob conception of God seemed very absurd to him. For man had formed it in the days when he still believed the earth to be flat, and had subsequently seen no good reason or obligation to change it. The man-mob had never gone beyond the idea that God was a definite person to whom certain things like praise and toadying were infinitely agreeable, and to whom certain other things like being happy and not very serious were as a red rag to a bull. This conception was the work of certain men who, the moment they had conceived a God in their own narrow and intolerant image, became themselves godlike. To men of that stamp simple and practical discoveries in geography, mechanics, or ceramics would have been utterly out of the question. But the greatest discovery of all with its precise descriptions and limitations lay to their credit. And from that time to this no very great number of men had ever taken the trouble to gainsay them, or ever would.

"I never did, for one," thought Derrick, and he recalled with a smile the religious phases through which he had passed in his earth life. As he remembered that he had once, for a short period of his childhood, believed in the fiery, old-fashioned Hell of the Puritans, the smile broadened, and he burst into joyous and musical laughter.

III

There was one thing that he must be prepared to face. His wife and their three children would *look* just as they had looked when he last saw them, and as a matter of fact they would *be* just what they were; but to him, with all his new and accurate knowledge and his inconceivably clear vision, they would seem to have changed greatly.

He had always considered his wife an intelligent, well-educated, even an advanced woman, and he had considered his children, especially the youngest, who was a girl, altogether brighter and more precocious than his neighbour's children. Well, along those lines he must be prepared for shocks and disillusionment.

It would not be possible, for instance, to sit down with his wife to a rational discussion of anything. She would seem like a moron to him: superstitious, backward, ignorant, and stubborn as a mule. He would find her erroneous beliefs and convictions hard to change. It would be the same with the children, but in less degree. The oldest was twelve, and his brain was still capable of a little development. He would have some inclination to listen to his father and to believe what his father told him. With Sammy aged ten, and Ethel, aged eight, much might be done.

He would begin by asking these young hopefuls to forget everything that had been taught them, with the exception of that one startling fact, that the world is round. He would then proceed to feed their eager young earth minds on as many simple and helpful truths as would be good for them, and he would show them, what was now so clear to him, how to find happiness on earth with a minimum of labour and worry.

A question carelessly thought and instantly answered caused him to return to earth sooner than he had intended. The answer to his question had been in the nature of a hard jolt. It had to do with sin.

Sin, he learned, is not doing something which other people regard as sinful, but something which you yourself know to be sinful. Lying, theft, arson, murder, bigamy may on occasion be acts of light, charity, and commiseration, no matter how the man-mob may execrate, judge, and punish them. But the same things may be also the worst of crimes. And only the individual who commits them can possibly know. That individual doesn't even have to know. It is what he thinks that counts; not what he pretends to think, not what he swears in open court that he did think, but what, without self-deception, he actually did and does think.

And Derrick learned that if during his brief absence from them any of those earth persons whom he loved so dearly had sinned, committed some act or other which they knew for themselves to be sinful, there would be an opaque veil which neither his eyes nor theirs could pierce, nor the words of their mouths.

But he was not *greatly* worried.

As men count time he had been absent from the earth and from his loved ones only for a very short time. They would still be in the depths of mourning for him. And even if they were evilly disposed persons, which they were not, they would hardly have had time to think of anything but their grief and their loss.

IV

As he left the Place of the wonderful lights and shades and colours and perfumes, he realized that he could not have been perfectly happy in it. He could not have been *perfectly* happy, because he now perceived that by the mere act of leaving it behind he had become still happier, and that perfect happiness could only be his when he reached "home" and beheld his loved ones.

When he had been taken from his home to the hospital the buds on the pear trees had been on the point of bursting. The pear trees would be in full bloom now. When he had been taken away the shutters of the house had been taken from their hinges, painted a pleasant apple green and stood in the old carriage house to dry. They would be back on their hinges now, vying in smartness with the two new coats of white paint which the painters had been spreading over the low rambling house itself. How sweet the house would look among the fresh young greens of spring! Perhaps the peewees who came every year had already begun to build in the veranda eaves.

The little river which tumbled over the old mill dam and for a mile flowed tranquilly on with little slipping rushes through his farm, would be very full of water now. It would be roaring and foaming among the rocks at the foot of the dam. The elms which shaded the bridge and the ford beside it would be at their best, before the leaves became worm-eaten and cobwebby. Perhaps one of the cars would be in the ford to its hubs getting washed, with one of the children sitting in the front seat. The dark blue roadster with the special body looked especially gay and sporty in the ford under the shadow of the elms.

He had no more than time to think these things before he had come to the end of his journey.

Home had never looked so sweet or inviting. The garden

was bounded on the south by a little brook; and beyond this was a little hill planted with kalmia and many species of native ferns.

It was on the top of this hill that he lighted, and here he paused for a while and filled his eyes with the humble beauty of the home which his earth mind had conceived and achieved.

Beyond the garden carpeted with jonquils and narcissuses between and above graceful pyramids of pear blossoms, the house, low and rambling, with many chimneys, gleamed in the sunlight. It was a heavenly day.

From the hill he could see not only the house, but to the left the garage and beyond that the stable. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, and it seemed queer to him that at that hour and at that season there should be no sign of life anywhere. Surely the gardener and his assistant ought to be at work. He turned a puzzled and indignant glance back upon the garden, and he observed a curious phenomenon.

A strip of soil in the upper left hand corner of the garden was being turned and broken by a spade. Near by a fork was taking manure from a wheelbarrow and spreading it over the roots of a handsome crab apple.

Both the spade and the fork appeared to be performing these meritorious acts without the aid of any human agency.

And Derrick knew at once that McIntyre, the gardener, and Chubb, his assistant, must, since his departure, have sinned in their own eyes, so that they could now no longer show themselves to him, or he to them.

He started anxiously toward the house, but a familiar sound arrested him.

The blue roadster, hitting on all its cylinders, came slowly out of the garage and descended the hill and crossed the bridge and honked its horn for the mill corner and sped off along the county road toward Stamford *all by itself*.

There was nobody in the roadster. He could swear to that.

And this meant, of course, that Britton, the chauffeur, had done something which he knew that he ought not to have done, and was for ever separated from those who had gone beyond.

When Derrick reached the house he was in an exceedingly

anxious state of mind. He stepped into the entrance hall and listened. And heard no sound. He passed rapidly through the master's rooms downstairs and upstairs. In the sewing room a thread and needle was mending the heel of a silk stocking, but there did not seem to be anybody in the room.

He looked from the window and saw two fishing poles and a tin pail moving eagerly toward the river. The boys, perhaps. Oh, what *could* they have done to separate themselves from him? The window was open and he called and shouted, but the fishing poles and the tin pail kept on going.

He went downstairs, through the dining room and into the pantry.

His heart stood still.

On tiptoe on the seat of a chair stood his little girl, Ethel. Her hair shone like spun gold. She looked like an angel. And his heart swelled with an exquisite bliss; but before he could speak to her and make himself known, she had reached down something from the next to the top shelf and put it in her mouth.

At that instant she vanished.

He lingered for a while about the house and gardens, but it was no use. He knew that. They had all sinned in some way or other, and therefore he was indeed dead to them, and they to him.

Back of the stables were woods. From these woods there came a sudden sound of barking. The sound was familiar to Derrick, and thrilled him.

"If I can hear Scoop," he thought, "Scoop can hear me."

He whistled long and shrill.

Not long after a little black dog came running, his stomach to the ground, his floppy silk ears flying. With a sob, Derrick knelt and took the little dog in his arms.

"Oh, Mumsey!" called Ethel. "Do come and look at Scoopie. He's doing all his tricks by himself, just as if somebody was telling him to do them."

The two looked from a window, and saw the little dog sit up and play dead and roll over—all very joyously—and jump as if through circled arms. Then they saw his tail droop and his head droop and his left hind leg begin to scratch

furiously at his ribs. He always *had* to do that when anyone scratched his back in a particular place.

When Derrick returned to the Place of the wonderful lights and shadows he was very unhappy and he knew that he must always be unhappy.

"Instead of coming to this Place," he said to himself, "knowing what I know now, I might just as well have gone to Hell."

A voice, sardonic and on the verge of laughter, answered him.

"That's just what you did."

SHADOWED

By MARY SYNON

From *Red Book*

ALL the way down from the Capitol, Stroude knew that he was being followed. From the moment he had come out of the Senate office building upon the plaza, fragrant with forsythia in the March moonlight, he had been conscious of the man who trailed his sauntering footsteps. He had led him down a winding way past the Marshall statue and into the deserted wideness of Pennsylvania Avenue. He had thought to lose him when he stepped into the lobby of a big hotel, pausing for a word there with men he knew, men who made their greetings casual or portentous, according to their knowledge of the turning of the inner wheels of Washington; but he found the other man some twenty paces behind him as he crossed Lafayette Square, and his amused acceptance of the situation curdled to annoyance at the possibility of having to deal with an irresponsible crank determined on an interview.

The day had been more than ordinarily difficult, one of the hardest Stroude had known since the turmoiled times of war. He had suffered under the sense of impending crisis knowing that his future hung on to-morrow's balance; and his temper, always drawn like a taut bow, had been ready to snap a hundred times through the afternoon's battle in the Senate chamber. Now, at the doorway of his house, that limestone palace of Georgian severity which loomed in stately classicism among the older residences of the neighbourhood, he poised the arrow of his wrath as he turned to confront the man behind him. "What do you want?" he snapped at him.

The man came nearer. By the dim light of the hall lan-

tern Stroude saw his shambling listlessness, and his hand went to his pocket with a thought of relief that the other sought only alms. The man, seeing the gesture, put up his hand arrestingly. "Remember me?" he inquired, almost too nonchalantly. His voice for all its soft slurring of the consonants, was threaded with a fibre of steel which edged the menace of his quiet poise.

"Why not?" Stroude asked sharply, his shoulders lifting as if for defence.

"Then I reckon you're none too glad to see me?"

"You haven't come here to ask me that. You might as well tell me first as last what you want from me."

"Nothing you'll call the sheriff about," the man told him. He faced the Senator squarely, revealing even in the half-darkness a certain racial resemblance to him which made them equals on the instant. For all Stroude's grooming and the stranger's shabbiness, they were strangely akin in their antagonism, bound not by family ties but by broader, more basic associations. Each of them, tall, thin, lithe, gazed on the other with unflinching blue eyes. Each of them kept watch with wildcat tenacity. From each of them emanated the recklessness of personal courage that takes no count of law beyond its own code. In their sudden springing to guard, the predominant characteristics of the two men, the Senator and the shambling shadower, flared up stronger than their setting, and although the lights of the White House gleamed golden across the Square, they were mountaineers facing each other in the hate of vendetta. The years and the place fell away from Stroude, leaving him stripped to the bone of his clan's creed.

"We've settled our own affairs before," Stroude said. "We can do it now."

As if the words gave him advantage, the other man seized them swiftly. "Let's do it, then," he replied. "I've come here to get you to do something you won't want to do. Will you fight me for it?"

"Not till I know the stake."

"Didn't you get her letter?"

"Whose?"

"There's only one woman I'd be coming to you about, I reckon."

"I've never heard from her since the day she went back to you. That was twenty-six years ago last May."

"The fourteenth."

"Why should she have written me now?"

"She's dying." The man's voice sounded in a softer timbre. "A month ago the doctor from the moonlight school told her that she had only a little while to live. She's been pining ever since, not about dying, for she's brave as any man, but for something I couldn't guess until she told me. She wants to see *you*. She wrote you a letter, but she was afraid you might not get it, and so she sent me. 'Tell him,' she said, 'that I won't rest easy in my grave over there on the side of Big Stony, if he don't come to me before I die. He told me once,' she said, 'that he'd come when I'd call. I'm calling now.' That's her message." His tone lifted from its softer depth. "Are you coming to her?"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I've a thousand duties. I've—— It's ridiculous."

"Then you're not coming?"

"How can I, Martin? I'm not my own man. I'm here for my state, for my country. I have work to do. I can't let any personal obligation interfere with it. Besides——"

"It couldn't hurt your wife, not even if she knew it. And Dell's dying."

"I'm sorry, Martin. I am, honestly. Will you tell Dell that I——"

"I'll tell her nothing but that you wouldn't come. Nothing else matters. And I think you owe her that, at least."

"But——"

The other man turned away, crossed the street, and walked back across the Square. Stroude could see him swinging on between the bushes, and the remembrance of another trail which Boyce Martin would climb rushed over him. More plainly than the crocus-bordered path to the White House shone the moonlit path up to the cabin on Pisgah where Dell Martin used to wait for his own coming, the cabin where she now waited for death. The memory of that way, twisting among laurel and rhododendrons, stabbed him more sharply than had Boyce Martin's words; but with the old habit of setting aside disturbing thoughts, he tried to

thrust the memory from his brain as he unlocked the door of his house.

A servant, coming forward at the sound of his key in the lock, gave him a message with a careful precision which bespoke respect for the executive management that directed his tasks. "Mrs. Stroude wishes you to be told, sir, that she is at the theatre and will see you when she comes in. And she made an appointment, sir, for Senator Manning and two other gentlemen to see you to-night on their way from the Pan-American dinner. She said it was very important."

He thanked the man and went upstairs to the library-switching on light after light to dispel its shrouding gloom. He tried to read, but the pages of the periodicals he took up ran into dullness. He chewed his cigar savagely, finding it flavourless. He strove to concentrate on his impending interview with Manning and his companions, realizing its portent, but he could not focus his attitude. Impatiently he thrust away the work which always waited his attention on his homecoming—findings of committees, digests of newspaper editorials, confidential reports on public interests in various measures, letters from men who had constituted themselves his captains. He frowned at the framed photograph of his wife, the only decoration she had placed upon his table; and he grimaced at the portrait of himself which Rhoda had set above the immaculate mantel. He was weary with work, he told himself, crossing the room and flinging wide open the windows which looked down on the Square.

The thrill of the night wind, prematurely warm as it crossed the Potomac, and burdened with elusive odours of a Southern March, caught him unawares. For a moment he stood drinking deeply of the immortal beauty of the recurrent spring-time. Memories he had thought long dead and buried went over him. Pictures more vivid than those on the walls framed themselves in the darkened greenery of the little park: a girl in a faded gingham dress waving him welcome on a hill road, a girl with eyes brighter than mountain stars telling him her love, flinging away all thought or care of herself, giving him everything and glorying in the gift, even to the last sacrifice of her departure from him. Not as she was now, Boyce Martin's wife dying in that far-away little

community of his native hills, but as she had been when she had defied their little world to come to him, Stroude saw her. In the thought of what she had been to him, he flung out his arms. "After all these years," he muttered, "after all these years!" And as if drawn by a power stronger than his will, he crossed to the table, and picking up the telephone, called the information desk of the Union Station. "What time does the Mountain Mail on the C. & O. go out now?" he asked. "One o'clock? One-fifteen." He hung up the receiver and saw again the photograph of his wife.

He studied it with suddenly arrested attention. What would she think of his desire to leave Washington at a time when, according to her fundamental ideas, his presence was imperative for the fulfillment of his ambition? Or was it her ambition? He gazed at the pictured countenance, seeing the determination of the uplifted chin, meeting the challenge in the steady eyes. Rhoda was certainly her father's daughter. Old Peter Armond's indomitable will and shrewdly calculating brain lived on in her. For the fourteen—or was it fifteen?—years of their marriage she had managed Stroude's career as cleverly as ever her father had directed one of his lieutenants, and he had acknowledged his debt to her with a certain attitude of amusement. Now, facing the last triumphal stage of its development, he felt an angry distaste of Rhoda's manœuvring. It might bring him, he conceded, to the goal but he wished he might have travelled a simpler path.

He had been an obscure Congressman of fiery political rectitude when he had met Rhoda Armond. She, and her group, and the circumstances the Armond connection had conjured for him, had made him into a statesman. Or was it only that they had made it possible for him to plant his own standards on the heights? At any rate, he owed her something, he thought. She was his wife, even though her attitude toward him was that of a director of destinies. She had given him, after all, what he had desired from her. She had made the upward road smooth, and she had dowered him with loyal faith in his ability. It wasn't fair to compare her attitude toward him with Dell's. He had never given to Rhoda what he had given Dell. Poor little Dell! But what good could he do her now by going to her? Twenty-five

years would have changed her as they had changed him. They had had their day, and the sun of it had set long since. "I won't go; I can't," he said, and turned back to the work on his desk, not looking up until his wife entered the room.

She came, a tall, consciously beautiful woman, bringing with her an aroma of power as subtle and as pervasive as the perfume of her toilet. She gave to Stroude the greeting of a perfunctory kiss on his brow, and stood off for his admiration. It was, however, not the product of her personality as much as her satisfaction in the work which struck him as he watched her. Rhoda's thought of herself as well as of him was that of a sculptor of his masterpieces. Stroude accepted it with the affectionate tolerance of a long marital relationship, feeling somehow sorrier for Rhoda than she would ever feel for herself, since she would never know what she had missed from life. "I was playing your game to-night," she told him.

"Isn't it yours too?" he smiled.

"In a way, yes," she acknowledged, "but this involved real sacrifice and I want reward. I went to the theatre with the Covingers."

"Was the play deadly?"

"No, but the Covingers are."

"He isn't a bad sort, and——"

"Oh, I know that he'll have the delegation from his state, and that it's one of the big states; but oh, my dear, have you ever had to listen to his wife?"

"She isn't so terrible, Rhoda."

"Oh, of course, if you will look at people as characters rather than as social factors, you won't see the awfulness of the Mrs. Covingers of Washington. But really——"

"Did Manning hint at why he had to see me to-night?"

"At nothing but the importance of seeing you. He is bringing he said, Mr. Laflin and Senator Wilk."

"He probably said Senator Wilk and Mr. Laflin, but you know the field well enough to put them in the order of their importance. Laflin's the new factor, a shrewd wolf raised in a wild forest."

"Does it mean"—she leaned forward, tapping the table with her fan in eagerness—"that they are going to ask you to take the nomination?"

"They haven't the entire giving of it, my dear."

"Don't be silly, Burton. You know that they are the architects of presidential nominations."

"But even architects——"

"Oh, Burt, don't quibble. You know that you're the logical man for the place. You're squarely based in party policies——"

"Safe, and steady." His tone was whimsical.

"But picturesque enough to be a good campaigner."

"Barefoot boy from the mountains. Good American stock with fine traditions. Reads rhetorically, doesn't it?"

"And a border state gives you strategic advantage."

"Some one has coached you well."

"I was coached before I ever knew you, Burt dear. My father taught us politics as religiously as my mother taught us sewing. It wasn't as practical, perhaps, as yours, but——"

"There haven't been many men more practical in their politics than Peter Armond," Stroude said dryly.

"Even if he did grow wealthy," his daughter defended, "you know how high he kept his standards."

"I can guess." Stroude said, but his tone gave her no handle to catch for controversy, and she swung into off-side statement. "Mrs. Covinger let slip something that may be vital to us," she told him.

"If it's vital, she let it slip with due deliberation," he declared. "Don't underestimate her brains, Rhoda, even if she wasn't raised by the Armond code. What did she say?"

"I don't believe I'll tell you."

"Yes, you will."

"We do run in double harness, don't we? Well, she said that Covinger wasn't going back to New York until to-morrow night, as there was a tremendously important conference at noon to-morrow. Seven men will be there, and they will decide the fate of the nation. That's exactly what she said. She's bombastic, you know."

"Seven? Then they're letting Covinger in?"

"You knew about it?"

"Not that it would be to-morrow."

"Is that why Senator Manning is coming to-night?"

"Probably."

"Then that means——" Her voice broke in excitement.

"That our fate hangs in the balance."

"Does it?"

"It looks like it." He smiled at her through the smoke of his cigar. Her eyes shone with myriad points of light. "Not planning what you'll wear at the inauguration, are you?" he teased her.

"No," she said, "but wondering what you'll say. It's wonderful, isn't it?"

"Don't count your chickens yet, Rhoda," he warned her. "We, both of us, know the thousand slips between the cup of consideration and the lip of nomination. We've gone through it all for other offices."

"But we've won every time," she said solemnly. "You've never been beaten, Burt. Don't you see what an advantage that is, now? You've been going up, and up, and up."

"The Senate's a rather high plateau, at that."

"But not the high mountain. Oh, Burt, think of it! It seems almost unbelievable, and yet I've always known you were destined for it. I knew you'd be great. Why, even in those first days here, you promised it. You knew it, too. You had the look of a man who was dedicated to something beyond the immediate, the look of one who is going to travel far and high. I believe that was one of the reasons why I loved you. And you——" She leaned over the table, and spread out the brilliant feathers of her fan, gazing at their splendour and not at her husband as she went on: "Did you love me when you married me?"

"Why else do men marry women?" he countered, letting the smoke veil his eyes.

"To put other women out of their lives, sometimes," she said.

"Well?" He drew hard on the cigar.

"I never knew until to-day who she was," she said. "I opened a letter by mistake. You may see from the envelope how easy it was for me to think it was addressed to me when I found it in my mail. It was directed merely to Washington, and the post office sent it to the house here."

"I quite understand," he said, and held out his hand for Dell Martin's letter.

His wife drew it from the gay bag she had borne, and gave it to him. For a moment he looked at the pitiful missive, contrasting it with the appointments of the table before him.

"She's dying," Rhoda said, "and she asks you to go to her."

"Yes," he said, "I know it."

"But——"

"How did I know? Her husband followed me down from the Hill to-night. He demanded that I return with him."

"Then she married, after——"

"She was married," he said, "when I met her."

"Oh!" She snapped shut the great fan, twisting its tortoise-shell handle between her lithe fingers. "When was that?"

"Before I knew you." He sank down into his chair, staring forward as if he were a judge considering a decision. "I was twenty-two years old, teaching school in the mountains and studying law with old Judge McLaurin, when I met Dell Martin. She had been married to Boyce against her will, as plenty of the girls in the hills are married. She was lonely and wretched, and lovelier than a wild rose. I was young and reckless. I fell in love with her and I made her love me. Boyce found it out. He drew me into a fight and I won it. He shot me then. Dell came to nurse me and I wouldn't let her go. Boyce wouldn't get a divorce and she couldn't, but she stayed with me. We had two years of utter happiness. I'd have gone through hell to win them."

A stick of the tortoise-shell handle of the fan broke in Rhoda's hands. "But you left her?"

"No," he said. "She left me. She saw before I did that it couldn't go on. She saw in me the ambition that I thought I had buried in my love for her. She knew that if I stayed with her, I'd never be anything but a miserable shyster, living from hand to mouth, despising myself and all I did, coming perhaps in time to hate her because she had been the cause of my degradation. She went to Judge McLaurin, and asked him to tell her the truth. He told her, old Covenanter that he was. Then she went up the mountain to Boyce and asked him if he wanted her to come back to him. She knew that it was the only action I'd consider final. He told her to come. She told me that she was leaving me. I pleaded with her all that night, but she went with the dawn. I couldn't hold her. I went up Pisgah with her till we came to the trail to Boyce's cabin. We could

see the wood smoke curling up above the masses of shining green leaves and pink clusters of the laurel. 'You're going away from me,' she said, 'far away, and you'll climb a higher mountain than Pisgah.' I begged her to come with me, but she shook her head. 'I'm giving you up for your sake,' she told me. 'But you need me,' I pleaded. 'Not now,' she said. 'But some day I shall, and then I'll call you. And no matter where you are, you'll come, won't you, Burt?' I promised her that I would. The last I saw of her was as she climbed the trail to Boyce's cabin. From that day to this"—he touched the crumpled little white letter—"she has sent me no word."

"It's strange, isn't it," Rhoda said, her voice not quite steady, "that a woman may live with a man through long years and never really know him at all?"

"Should I have told you?"

"I don't know," she said. "I suppose I'd have married you, even if you had. It's not deception, perhaps, when you've never seen her nor written to her since you married me; and yet—— Are you going to her, Burt?"

"To-morrow's the conference. I must be there if I am to be the man chosen."

"Do you want to go?"

"I wonder," he mused, "if you'll understand me when I tell you that, other things being equal, I should go to-night. It's with no sense of failing you, and with no idea of helping her, but I promised her—that I'd come if she called."

"Even if there weren't the conference," Rhoda said, "you're a marked man now. You couldn't go back to a little village in the mountains without it being known and the reason for it blazoned. It wouldn't do, would it?" She could not quite succeed in making her tone judicial. Her own eagerness palpitated back of the assumed impartiality. "You've wanted the presidency too long to throw away the chance of it."

"I've never wanted it," he said.

"You don't mean," she demanded, her vexation rising into view, "that I've urged you to seek something you haven't desired?"

"It's more complex than that," he shrugged. "I suppose it's simply that I married the Armond hope as well as you."

Old Peter set a standard for your family which has kept you all up on your toes. If the dead see, he must chuckle sometimes over its way of working."

"Why?" she flared, letting her annoyance catch at a point of difference less vital than the main issue. "He gave his whole service to his country. He was one of the really great men of his generation, wasn't he? You've never known my father as I knew him. You've always let yourself be influenced by the demagogic attacks on him. You've thought that because he made a great fortune he couldn't be an idealist. Haven't you seen that, if he had been a materialist, he wouldn't have trained his family as he did? Why, it's been his torch that I've tried to keep alight, and if I have done anything for you, Burton, it has been by that torch's flame."

"You've done a very great deal, Rhoda," he said. "I'm not questioning the number or the brightness of the candles you've burned in my game. I'm only questioning the value of the game itself. Power's like money. If you give up all else to possess it, then it possesses you."

"But——"

"I know. I should have chosen long ago. I'm not turning back now. I owe you that, I think. If I'm anything at all beyond a struggling lawyer in a little city——" He broke off suddenly as the young servant came to the library curtains.

"Senator Manning and two other gentlemen," he announced.

They came almost on his heels, three men with the aspect of dignitaries: Manning tall, thin, almost cadaverous, with the eye and the hand of a Richelieu; Wilk heavy, ponderous, inscrutable as a great Buddha; Laffin, a blend of college professor and Wall Street lawyer, hiding a predatory keenness behind horn-rimmed spectacles. Characteristically, Stroude felt, they fell into place, Wilk into the nearest easy chair, Manning into an Italian seat which put him in the centre of a softly lighted stage, and Laffin back in the shadows. After a moment of casual conversation Rhoda rose to leave them. Stroude halted her. "I have an idea," he said, "that these gentlemen have come to me on an errand which concerns you as well as myself.—Do you mind if she stays?"

"Not at all," said Manning suavely. Laffin nodded,

and old man Wilk grunted assent. Rhoda went over beyond Laflin as far outside the group as she could, and just out of her husband's line of vision; but he turned his chair a little, that he might encompass her in his sight as Manning began to speak.

"It makes it a little easier for us," he said, "that you have guessed something of our mission."

"I couldn't help knowing," Stroude swung back, "when every other man in the Senate has known it for days."

"Not definitely," boomed Wilk. "There's always talk, of course, and often more smoke than fire."

"Sometimes it's only a screen for the protection of a real issue," Manning went on, "but in this case the fire is burning. You know, I am sure, that the conference to determine the best candidate for the next term of the presidency is to be held here in Washington to-morrow."

"At noon," smiled Stroude.

"Your information," Manning said, "is speedy as well as accurate. The time was not determined until seven o'clock this evening. Seven men know it."

"And their wives," cut in Laflin, peering at Rhoda.

"We have canvassed the field thoroughly before coming to you," Manning continued with his air of authoritative spokesmanship. "We have eliminated, for one reason or another, all the men who have been under consideration. Bannister is too old. Maxwell is too radical. Vandringham is too theatrical. Stearns is too variable. Durham is too light. Landreau lacks the necessary tradition. Penn comes from the wrong location. Jarvis jumped the party. The process brings us to you."

"How about Corliss?"

"I don't mind telling you," Manning said, "that Carmichael is fighting desperately for Corliss, and that, without Covinger's help, he *might* be able to swing the conference. Mr. Laflin, Senator Wilk, and I have never swerved from our determination to have you. Carmichael has Bennett and Franklin with him. Covinger is the determining vote. You have him."

"Are you sure?"

"Certain. He's attending on Parker's proxy. We won that point this afternoon. He's solidly with you."

"Even against Corliss? Corliss is from his state."

"Even against him."

"Why?"

"Well, it seems that Corliss has an old scandal against him which frightens Covinger. He's afraid that it might make an election issue. By the way—— You're not interested in these affairs, Mrs. Stroude?"

"Very vitally," she said, "and there's nothing you need fear to discuss before me."

Manning cleared his throat, and old man Wilk stirred uneasily in his chair. Laffin's mobile mouth twisted.

"Go on," said Stroude. "What's the charge?"

"Carmichael says," Manning stated, "that there's an old story back in your own state, Stroude, that might explode. We've all known you a good many years, all of us but Laffin, and we've never heard a whisper of it. I have told him that I do not believe it. So has Senator Wilk."

"What's the story?" Stroude's fingers, lighting a match, did not tremble.

"Well, if you insist——"

"I do."

"Carmichael says that you stole another man's wife."

"There was no theft about it. She came with me. Later she went back to her husband. I left the place, started to practise law, and married. My wife never heard the story until to-night." He looked down at Dell Martin's letter, not yet read by him, topping the documents on the table in front of him. "It's an old story," he said, "and one not likely to explode unless——"

"Unless what?" Laffin demanded from the gloom.

"Unless I choose to revive it by an overt act," Stroude retorted. "It all happened more than twenty-five years ago in a tiny community in the mountains. I know the people there. They're my kind, my stock. They won't talk to strangers coming in. There's only one way the newspapers could get the story. I'd have to lead them to it."

"That's true," old man Wilk grunted. "I know the mountains."

"Then it's settled," Manning said with evident relief. "I fancy a story as old as that, cut off altogether by the time between, could not be a very appalling Banquo's ghost."

He arose a little wearily. "You'll be at the conference tomorrow?" He named the time and place. "It's necessary that you should be. Without you, Covinger may switch. You may have to combat Carmichael directly. You'll be ready?"

"If I'm—if it's necessary," Stroude said.

The other two men stood up. Wilk unyieldily, Laflin with quick ease, smiling at Stroude as he held out his hand. "This was a real star-chamber session," he said, "according to the best rules of old Peter Armond. Wouldn't the old pirate have loved to sit in a ten-minute game of four men who decided the next president?"

"What do you mean?" Rhoda's voice rang out in challenge, and Manning and Wilk rushed to speech to head off Laflin, but he went on in almost boyish unconcern: "Old Peter trained me, you know, and I've always had a soft spot for him in my heart, although I've known what a wolf in sheep's clothing he was. We have to hand it to him, though, that with all his grafting and his materialism, he was a great party builder. He was the first of the Warwicks in American national life. We're just rattling around in his shoes, but we'll do our best to put you over."

He moved off, almost pushed by Manning's eagerness to depart, but his voice seemed to linger in the room after the three of them had gone. Stroude sat toying with a paper-knife. Rhoda, deep in the shadows, did not stir. A clock in the hall boomed twelve. Stroude, sighing, put his hand over Dell Martin's letter. Then Rhoda spoke. "Is Mr. Laflin telling the truth about my father," she asked Stroude, "or what he thinks is the truth?"

"The truth."

"That he wasn't an idealist—a patriot?"

"Well, if he was——"

"I understand. And you've known it always?"

"Since before I knew you."

"Then do you mean"—she came back to the chair beside the table—"that through all these years my standards have meant nothing to you? That you have known them to be false?"

"They aren't false," he said. "The standards are true enough."

"But the man who gave them to me wasn't?"

"Well, he didn't live up to the code."

"Your own code?"

"I've tried to hold to it."

"The one Judge McLaurin taught you?"

"The very one. The one Judge Foxwell taught *him*. *He* got it, I believe, from John Marshall. Don't think about it, Rhoda. Those old boys lived in different days. Sometimes I think that I'm an anachronism." He sought to smile at her, but the smile faded before her intensity. "Don't let a chance word of Laffin's bother you," he counselled. "He didn't know you, of course, as your father's daughter, or he'd have cut out his tongue before saying what he did."

"It doesn't matter who said it," she declared. "It's not that alone that hurts; it's the knowledge that I've meant so little to you that cuts deep—now. I used to think, Burt, even when I knew that you didn't love me, that I was giving you something fine and splendid. I let myself believe that the Armond tradition was the beacon which was lighting your way. I thought that if I couldn't give you anything else, I was at least giving you that torch. And now I find out that the light I was holding for you was only marsh fire. You've never needed me!" Her voice rose to accusation.

"Oh, yes," he countered, but he could not put verity into his tone.

"No," she said. "You don't owe me anything for the playing of the game. I've loved that for itself."

"But you thought you were giving me the other——"

"And I wasn't. It's really a joke, isn't it? A buccaneer teaching his family the Golden Rule, and the family passing it on!"

"It isn't a joke, Rhoda. I've always taken it in the measure of your intention."

"And been sorry for me?"

"Yes."

"I've never sought pity."

"None of us do."

"It's funny, isn't it," she mused, "that one woman who loved you set you free, so that another woman whom you didn't love might take away that freedom?"

"I've had as much freedom as most men," he said, but his

eyes went back to the crumpled missive. Rhoda's glance, following his, saw its significance. "Read it," she challenged him. He hesitated an instant, as if doubting his desire to read it before her watchfulness, then drew the letter from its envelope.

Pale tracing on common paper met his gaze. "*Burt,*" he read, "*you're a great man now, and maybe you've forgotten me. I've never forgotten you. Every morning and every night I've prayed for you. Boyce has been good to me, better than I deserved; but oh, Burt, all that my life has been since I left you is just a hope that eternity will bring us together again. I used to believe it would, but I'm getting afraid, now that it's coming near. Won't you come to me for just one hour before I go? You told me once that hell wouldn't keep you if I——*"

Before the pathos of the call something in Stroude's soul trembled. He didn't love Dell now, he told himself as he came to the end of the page. He hadn't loved her in twenty years. There was no thrill of remembered passion rising from the white page to stir his heart, but there was something deeper, more poignant than romance in the plea which this woman in the mountains had sent him across time and distance. Through those long years she had never wavered in her belief in him and in the promise he had made to her. Out of the depths of his spirit he had told her that he would come to her if she should ever need him. It was a promise given not only to the woman who had heard and heeded it, but to the God of his faith and his fathers. If he failed to keep it, no matter what the cost, he would be violating more than an old love. He would be tearing down his own code. Through whatever glory might come to him he would know himself as a man who had failed in the one virtue on which he had always prided himself, the keeping of his word. It was an oath he had taken to Dell Martin, just as he would take an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States if—if he climbed the mountain of Rhoda's vision!

Realization of the immediacy of his problem came to him with the sight of his wife's fan, broken, lying beyond the letter in his hand. He looked up to find Rhoda's eyes studying him. But he must not fail her, he told himself, snatching at the straw of conventionality in the current of emotion. The very fact that he had not given her love put him under

obligation to her. Because of her, because of the expectations she had harboured for him, because of the time and thought and labour she had spent for the advancement she had thought he sought, because of her very disillusionment now, he could not fail her. He must go to the conference, even if it meant the breaking of a vow he had made before the altar of his one great love. It was part of the price, he reasoned, that all men pay for power; but he felt that something within him was dying as he turned the page of Dell Martin's letter.

"—if I called for you," he picked up the thread. *"That was why I didn't call when I needed you before, when our boy was born. I couldn't let you know about him. You'd never have let me go if you'd known. But it doesn't matter now, does it? And oh, Burt, I need you so! If you'll only hold my hand again, I won't fear the crossing. And perhaps when you come to die, you'll find the going easier if you have the memory of this hour you'll give me. Won't you come?"* It was signed waveringly, *"Dell."*

He folded it back into the envelope, and put it in his pocket. "You aren't going?" Rhoda asked him, her voice strangely strained.

"Yes," he said, "I'm going."

"But to-morrow——"

"It's the long years afterward I'm thinking of," he told her.

"And the nomination——"

"Sometimes the things we put out of our lives," he said, "are the only things we really keep."

"That's ridiculous," she said. "I can't understand you at all to-night, Burton. Why should a man give up the highest honour a nation can give him——"

"There are other kinds of honour, Rhoda."

"To go to a woman he hasn't seen for twenty-five years?"

"She is the——" he began, then halted quickly in the fear of the hurt his word might give her.

"I understand," she said.

She picked up her broken fan, and moved toward the door, but before she reached it, turned back. Her face was stonily calm. "Shall I telephone Senator Manning in the morning that you will not be there?" she asked him.

"If you will," he said.

As his car bore him past the shadowy white pile on the other side of the Square, Stroude sighed. A man does not live with a dream—even the dream of another—through season after season without catching some gleam of its radiance; but in Boyce Martin's straight look as he met him at the train gate, Stroude began to drink of his justification.

"You Stroudes always kept your word," the other man said.

"We aim to," said Stroude, unconsciously slipping back into the vernacular of his youth. "It was her letter," he explained. "I never knew about the boy."

"I know," said Martin. "I—I've loved him as if he'd been the child I've never had. That's why I came for you." He held out his hand and Stroude grasped it. "You're one of us, after all."

As the train slid past the Potomac and threaded the low pines of the Virginia river lands, Stroude pondered the mountaineer's tribute. In the light of it he saw the path to Dell Martin's cabin leading higher than the way across the Square. For the first time in many years he felt the surge of freedom rising in his soul. A thousand shackles fell away as the last lights of Washington slid down on the horizon.

THE ONE HUNDRED DOLLAR BILL

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

From *McCall's*

THE new one hundred dollar bill, clean and green, freshening the heart with the colour of springtime, slid over the glass of the teller's counter and passed under his grille to a fat hand, dingy on the knuckles, but brightened by a flawed diamond. This interesting hand was a part of one of those men who seem to have too much fattened muscle for their clothes: his shoulders distended his overcoat; his calves strained the sprightly checked cloth, a little soiled, of his trousers; his short neck bulged above the glossy collar. His hat, round and black as a pot and appropriately small, he wore slightly obliqued, while under its curled brim his small eyes twinkled surreptitiously between those upper and nether puffs of flesh that mark the too faithful practitioner of unhallowed gaieties. Such was the first individual owner of the new one hundred dollar bill, and he at once did what might have been expected of him.

Moving away from the teller's grille, he made a cylindrical packet of bills smaller in value—"ones" and "fives"—then placed round them, as a wrapper, the beautiful one hundred dollar bill, snapped a rubber band over it; and the desired inference was plain: a roll all of hundred dollar bills, inside as well as outside. Something more was plain, too: obviously the man's small head had a sportive plan in it, for the twinkle between his eye puffs hinted of liquor in the offing and lively women impressed by a show of masterly riches. Here, in brief, was a man who meant to make a night of it, who would feast, dazzle, compel deference and be loved. For money gives power, and power is loved; no

doubt he would be loved. He was happy, and went out of the bank believing that money is made for joy.

So little should we be certain of our happiness in this world. The splendid one hundred dollar bill was taken from him untimely, before nightfall that very evening. At the corner of two busy streets he parted with it to the law, though in a mood of excruciating reluctance and only after a cold-blooded threatening on the part of the lawyer. This latter walked away thoughtfully with the one hundred dollar bill, not now quite so clean, in his pocket.

Collinson was the lawyer's name, and in years he was only twenty-eight, but already of the slightly harried appearance that marks the young husband who begins to suspect that the better part of his life was his bachelorhood. His dark, ready-made clothes, his twice soled shoes, and his hair, which was too long for a neat and businesslike aspect, were symptoms of necessary economy; but he did not wear the eager look of a man who saves to "get on for himself." Collinson's look was that of an employed man who only deepens his rut with his pacing of it.

An employed man he was, indeed; a lawyer without much hope of ever seeing his name on the door or on the letters of the firm that employed him, and his most important work was the collection of small debts. This one hundred dollar bill now in his pocket was such a collection, small to the firm and the client, though of a noble size to himself and the long-pursued debtor from whom he had just collected it.

The banks were closed; so was the office, for it was six o'clock and Collinson was on his way home when by chance he encountered the debtor: there was nothing to do but to keep the bill overnight. This was no hardship, however, as he had a faint pleasure in the unfamiliar experience of walking home with such a thing in his pocket; and he felt a little important by proxy when he thought of it.

Upon the city the November evening had come down dark and moist. Lighted windows and street lamps appeared and disappeared in the altering thicknesses of fog, but at intervals, as Collinson walked on northward, he passed a small shop, or a cluster of shops, where the light was close to him and bright, and at one of these oases of illumination he lingered a moment, with a thought to buy a toy in the window

for his three-year-old little girl. The toy was a gaily coloured acrobatic monkey that willingly climbed up and down a string, and he knew that the "baby," as he and his wife still called their child, would scream with delight at the sight of it. He hesitated, staring into the window rather longingly, and wondering if he ought to make such a purchase. He had twelve dollars of his own in his pocket, but the toy was marked "35 cents," and he decided he could not afford it. So he sighed and went on, turning presently into a darker street.

When he reached home, the baby was crying over some inward perplexity not to be explained; and his wife, pretty and a little frowzy, was as usual, and as he had expected. That is to say, he found her irritated by cooking, bored by the baby, and puzzled by the dull life she led. Other women, it appeared, had happy and luxurious homes, and during the malnourished dinner she had prepared she mentioned many such women by name, laying particular stress upon the achievements of their husbands. Why should she ("alone," as she put it) lead the life she did in one room and a kitchenette, without even being able to afford to go to the movies more than once or twice a month? Mrs. Theodore Thompson's husband had bought a perfectly beautiful little sedan automobile; he gave his wife everything she wanted. Mrs. Will Gregory had merely mentioned that her old Hudson seal coat was wearing a little, and her husband had instantly said: "What'll a new one come to, girlie? Four or five hundred? Run and get it!" Why were other women's husbands like that—and why, oh, why—was hers like *this*?"

"My goodness!" he said. "You talk as if I had sedans and sealskin coats and theatre tickets *on* me! Well, I haven't; that's all!"

"Then go out and get 'em!" she said fiercely. "Go out and get 'em!"

"What with?" he inquired. "I have twelve dollars in my pocket, and a balance of seventeen dollars at the bank; that's twenty-nine. I get twenty-five from the office day after to-morrow—Saturday; that makes fifty-four; but we have to pay forty-five for rent on Monday; so that'll leave us nine dollars. Shall I buy you a sedan and a sealskin coat on Tuesday, out of the nine?"

Mrs. Collinson began to weep a little. "The old, old story!" she said. "Six long, long years it's been going on now! I ask you how much you've got, and you say, 'nine dollars,' or 'seven dollars,' or 'four dollars,' and once it was sixty-five cents! Sixty-five cents; that's what we had to live on! Sixty-five *cents!*"

"Oh, hush!" he said wearily.

"Hadn't you better hush a little yourself?" she retorted. "You come home with twelve dollars in your pocket and tell your wife to hush! That's nice? Why can't you do what decent men do?"

"What's that?"

"Why, give their wives something to live for. What do you give me, I'd like to know! Look at the clothes I wear, please!"

"Well, it's your own fault," he muttered.

"What did you say! Did you say it's my fault I wear clothes any women I know wouldn't be *seen* in?"

"Yes, I did. If you hadn't made me get you that platinum ring——"

"What!" she cried, and flourished her hand at him across the table. "Look at it! It's platinum, yes; but look at the stone in it, about the size of a pinhead, so's I'm ashamed to wear it when any of my friends see me! A hundred and sixteen dollars is what this magnificent ring cost you, and how long did I have to beg before I got even that little out of you? And it's the best thing I own and the only thing I ever did get out of you!"

"Oh, Lordy!" he moaned.

"I wish you'd seen Charlie Loomis looking at this ring to-day," she said, with a desolate laugh. "He happened to notice it, and I saw him keep glancing at it, and I wish you'd seen Charlie Loomis's expression!"

Collinson's own expression became noticeable upon her introduction of this name; he stared at her gravely until he completed the mastication of one of the indigestibles she had set before him; then he put down his fork and said:

"So you saw Charlie Loomis again to-day. Where?"

"Oh, my!" she sighed. "Have we got to go over all that again?"

"Over all what?"

"Over all the fuss you made the last time I mentioned Charlie's name. I thought we settled it you were going to be a little more sensible about him."

"Yes," Collinson returned. "I was going to be more sensible about him, because *you* were going to be more sensible about him. Wasn't that the agreement?"

She gave him a hard glance, tossed her head so that the curls of her bobbed hair fluttered prettily, and with satiric mimicry repeated his question. "'Agreement! Wasn't that the agreement! Oh, my, but you do make me tired, talking about 'agreements'! As if it was a crime my going to a vaudeville matinée with a man kind enough to notice that my husband never takes me anywhere!'"

"Did you go to a vaudeville with him to-day?"

"No, I didn't!" she said. "I was talking about the time when you made such a fuss. I didn't go anywhere with him to-day."

"I'm glad to hear it," Collinson said. "I wouldn't have stood for it."

"Oh, you wouldn't?" she cried, and added a shrill laugh as further comment. "You 'wouldn't have stood for it'!"

"Never mind," he returned doggedly. "We went over all that the last time, and you understand me: I'll have no more foolishness about Charlie Loomis."

"How nice of you! He's a friend of yours; you go with him yourself; but your wife mustn't even look at him, just because he happens to be the one man that amuses her a little. That's fine!"

"Never mind," Collinson said again. "You say you saw him to-day. I want to know where."

"Suppose I don't choose to tell you."

"You'd better tell me, I think."

"Do you? I've got to answer for every minute of my day, have I?"

"I want to know where you saw Charlie Loomis."

She tossed her curls again, and laughed. "Isn't it funny!" she said. "Just because I like a man, he's the one person I can't have anything to do with! Just because he's kind and jolly and amusing, and I like his jokes and his thoughtfulness toward a woman when he's with her, I'm not to be allowed to see him at all! But my *husband*—oh, that's entirely dif-

ferent! *He* can go out with Charlie whenever he likes and have a good time, while I stay home and wash the dishes! Oh, it's a lovely life!"

"Where did you see him to-day?"

Instead of answering his question, she looked at him plaintively and allowed tears to shine along her lower eyelids. "Why do you treat me like this?" she asked in a feeble voice. "Why can't I have a man friend if I want to? I do like Charlie Loomis. I do like him——"

"Yes! That's what I noticed!"

"Well, but what's the good of always insulting me about him? He has time on his hands of afternoons, and so have I. Our janitor's wife is crazy about the baby and just adores to have me leave her in their flat—the longer the better. Why shouldn't I go to a *matinée* or a picture show sometimes with Charlie? Why should I just have to sit around instead of going out and having a nice time, when he wants me to?"

"I want to know where you saw him to-day!"

Mrs. Collinson jumped up. "You make me sick!" she said, and began to clear away the dishes.

"I want to know where——"

"Oh, hush up!" she cried. "He came here to leave a note for you."

"Oh," said her husband. "I beg your pardon. That's different."

"How sweet of you!"

"Where's the note, please?"

She took it from her pocket and tossed it to him. "So long as it's a note for *you* it's all right, of course," she said. "I wonder what you'd do if he'd written one to me!"

"Never mind," said Collinson, and read the note.

DEAR COLLIE: Dave and Smithie and Old Bill and Sammy Hoag and maybe Steinie and Sol are coming over to the shack about eighty. Home brew and the old pastime. *You* know! Don't fail.

CHARLIE.

"You've read this of course," Collinson said. "The envelope wasn't sealed."

"I have not," his wife returned, covering the prevarication with a cold dignity. "I'm not in the habit of reading other people's correspondence, thank you! I suppose you think

I do so because you'd never hesitate to read any note *I* got; but I don't do everything you do, you see!"

"Well, you can read it now," he said, and gave her the note.

Her eyes swept the writing briefly, and she made a sound of wonderment, as if amazed to find herself so true a prophet. "And the words weren't more than out of my mouth! *You* can go and have a grand party right in his flat, while your wife stays home and gets the baby to bed and washes the dishes!"

"I'm not going."

"Oh, no!" she said mockingly. "I suppose not! I see you missing one of Charlie's stag parties!"

"I'll miss this one."

But it was not to Mrs. Collinson's purpose that he should miss the party; she wished him to be as intimate as possible with the debonair Charlie Loomis; and so, after carrying some dishes into the kitchenette in meditative silence, she reappeared with a changed manner. She went to her husband, gave him a shy little pat on the shoulder and laughed good-naturedly. "Of course you'll go," she said. "I do think you're silly about my never going out with him when it would give me a little innocent pleasure and when you're not home to take me, yourself; but I wasn't really in such terrible earnest, all I said. You work hard the whole time, honey, and the only pleasure you ever do have, it's when you get a chance to go to one of these little penny-ante stag parties. You haven't been to one for ever so long, and you never stay after twelve; it's really all right with me. I want you to go."

"Oh, no," said Collinson. "It's only penny-ante, but I couldn't afford to lose anything at all."

"If you did lose, it'd only be a few cents," she said. "What's the difference, if it gives you a little fun? You'll work all the better if you go out and enjoy yourself once in a while."

"Well, if you really look at it that way, I'll go."

"That's right, dear," she said, smiling. "Better put on a fresh collar and your other suit, hadn't you?"

"I suppose so," he assented, and began to make the changes she suggested.

When he had completed his toilet, it was time for him to

go. She came in from the kitchenette, kissed him, and then looked up into his eyes, letting him see a fond and brightly amiable expression.

"There, honey," she said. "Run along and have a nice time. Then maybe you'll be a little more sensible about some of *my* little pleasures."

He held the one hundred dollar bill folded in his hand, meaning to leave it with her, but as she spoke a sudden recurrence of suspicion made him forget his purpose. "Look here," he said. "I'm not making any bargain with you. You talk as if you thought I was going to let you run around to vaudeville with Charlie because you let me go to this party. Is that your idea?"

It was, indeed, precisely Mrs. Collinson's idea, and she was instantly angered enough to admit it in her retort. "Oh, aren't you *mean!*" she cried. "I might know better than to look for any fairness in a man like you!"

"See here——"

"Oh, hush up!" she said. "Shame on you! Go on to your party!" With that she put both hands upon his breast, and pushed him toward the door.

"I won't go. I'll stay here."

"You will, too, go!" she cried, shrewishly. "I don't want to look at you around here all evening. It'd make me sick to look at a man without an ounce of fairness in his whole mean little body!"

"All right," said Collinson, violently, "I *will* go!"

"Yes! Get out of my sight!"

And he did, taking the one hundred dollar bill with him, to the penny-ante poker party.

The gay Mr. Charlie Loomis called his apartment "the shack" in jocular depreciation of its beauty and luxury, but he regarded it as a perfect thing, and in one way it was: for it was perfectly in the family likeness of a thousand such "shacks." It had a ceiling with false beams, walls of green burlap, spotted with coloured "coaching prints," brown shelves supporting pewter plates and mugs, "mission" chairs, a leather couch with violent cushions, silver-framed photographs of lady friends and officer friends, a drop light of pink-shot imitation alabaster, a papier-mâché skull tobacco jar among moving-picture magazines on the round card

table; and, of course, the final Charlie Loomis touch—a Japanese manservant.

The master of all this was one of those neat, stoutish young men with fat, round heads, sleek, fair hair, immaculate, pale complexions, and infirm little pink mouths—in fact, he was of the type that may suggest to the student of resemblances a fastidious and excessively clean white pig with transparent ears. Nevertheless, Charlie Loomis was of a free-handed habit in some matters, being particularly indulgent to pretty women and their children. He spoke of the latter as “the kiddies,” of course, and liked to call their mothers “kiddo,” or “girlie.” One of his greatest pleasures was to tell a woman that she was “the dearest, bravest little girlie in the world.” Naturally he was a welcome guest in many households, and would often bring a really magnificent toy to the child of some friend whose wife he was courting. Moreover, at thirty-three, he had already done well enough in business to take things easily, and he liked to give these little card parties, not for gain, but for pastime. He was cautious and disliked high stakes in a game of chance.

“I don’t consider it hospitality to have any man go out o’ my shack sore,” he was wont to say. “Myself, I’m a bachelor and got no obligations; I’ll shoot any man that can afford it for anything he wants to. Trouble is, you never can tell when a man *can’t* afford it or what harm his losin’ might mean to the little girlie at home and the kiddies. No, boys, penny-ante and ten-cent limit is the highest we go in this ole shack. Penny-ante and a few steins of the ole home-brew that hasn’t got a divorce in a barrel of it!”

Penny-ante and the ole home-brew had been in festal operation for half an hour when the morose Collinson arrived this evening. Mr. Loomis and his guests sat about the round table under the alabaster drop light; their coats were off; cigars were worn at the deliberative poker angle; colourful chips and cards glistened on the cloth; one of the players wore a green shade over his eyes; and all in all, here was a little poker party for a lithograph.

“Ole Collie, b’gosh!” Mr. Loomis shouted, humorously. “Here’s your vacant cheer; stack all stuck out for you ’n’ ever’tin’! Set daown, neighbour, an’ Smithie’ll deal you in, next hand. What made you so late? Helpin’ the little

girlie at home get the kiddy to bed? That's a great kiddy of yours, Collie."

Collinson took the chair that had been left for him, counted his chips and then as the playing of a "hand" still preoccupied three of the company, he picked up a silver dollar that lay upon the table near him. "What's this?" he sked. "A side bet? Or did somebody just leave it here for me?"

"Yes; for you to look at," Mr. Loomis explained. "It's Smithie's."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Nothin'. Smithie was just showin' it to us. Look at it."

Collinson turned the coin over and saw a tiny inscription that had been lined into the silver with a point of steel. "Luck," he read—"Luck hurry back to me!" Then he spoke to the owner of this marked dollar. "I suppose you put that on there, Smithie, to help make sure of getting our money to-night."

But Smithie shook his head, which was a large, gaunt head, as it happened—a head fronted with a sallow face shaped much like a coffin, but inconsistently genial in expression. "No," he said. "It just came in over my counter this afternoon, and I noticed it when I was checkin' up the day's cash. Funny, ain't it: 'Luck hurry back to me!'"

"Who do you suppose marked that on it?" Collinson said thoughtfully.

"Golly!" his host exclaimed. "It won't do you much good to wonder about that!"

Collinson frowned, continuing to stare at the marked dollar. "I guess not, but really I should like to know."

"I would, too," Smithie said. "I been thinkin' about it. Might 'a' been somebody in Seattle or somebody in Ipswich, Mass., or New Orleans or St. Paul. How you goin' to tell? It's funny how some people like to believe luck depends on some little thing like that."

"Yes, it is," Collinson assented, still brooding over the coin.

The philosophic Smithie extended his arm across the table collecting the cards to deal them, for the "hand" was finished. "Yes, sir, it's funny," he repeated. "Nobody knows exactly what luck is, but the way I guess it out, it lays in a man's *believin'* he's in luck, and some little object like this makes him kind of concentrate his mind on thinkin' he's

goin' to be lucky, because of course you often *know* you're goin' to win, and then you do win. You don't win when you *want* to win, or when you need to; you win when you believe you'll win. I don't know who it was that said, 'Money's the root of all evil'; but I guess he didn't have *too* much sense! I suppose if some man killed some other man for a dollar, the poor fish that said that would let the man out and send the dollar to the chair——"

But here this garrulous and discursive guest was interrupted by immoderate protests from several of his colleagues. "Cut it out!" "My Lord!" "*Do* something!" "Smithie! Are you ever goin' to *deal*?"

"I'm goin' to shuffle first," he responded, suiting the action to the word, though with deliberation, and at the same time continuing his discourse. "It's a mighty interesting thing, a piece o' money. You take this dollar, now: Who's it belonged to? Where's it been? What different kind o' funny things has it been spent for sometimes? What funny kind of secrets do you suppose it could 'a' heard if it had ears? Good people have had it and bad people have had it: why, a dollar could tell more about the human race—why, it could tell *all* about it!"

"I guess it couldn't tell all about the way you're dealin' those cards," said the man with the green shade. "You're mixin' things all up."

"I'll straighten 'em all out then," said Smithie cheerfully. "They say, 'Money talks.' Golly! If it *could* talk, what couldn't it tell? Nobody'd be safe. I got this dollar now, but who's it goin' to belong to next, and what'll *he* do with it? And then after *that*! Why, for years and years and years, it'll go on from one pocket to another, in a millionaire's house one day, in some burglar's flat the next, maybe, and in one person's hand money'll do good, likely, and in another's it'll do harm. We all *want* money; but some say it's a bad thing, like that dummy I was talkin' about. Lordy! Goodness or badness, I'll take all anybody——"

He was interrupted again, and with increased vehemence. Collinson, who sat next to him, complied with the demand to "ante up," then placed the dollar near his little cylinder of chips, and looked at his cards. They proved unencouraging, and he turned to his neighbour. "I'd sort of like to have

that marked dollar, Smithie," he said. "I'll give you a paper dollar, Smithie," he said. "I'll give you a paper dollar and a nickel for it."

But Smithie laughed, shook his head and slid the coin over toward his own chips. "No, sir. I'm goin' to keep it—awhile, anyway."

"So you do think it'll bring you luck, after all!"

"No. But I'll hold on to it for this evening, anyhow."

"Not if we clean you out, you won't," said Charlie Loomis. "You know the rules o' the old shack: only cash goes in *this* game; no I. O. U. stuff ever went here or ever will. Tell you what I'll do, though, before you lose it: I'll give you a dollar and a quarter for your ole silver dollar, Smithie."

"Oh, you want it, too, do you? I guess I can spot what sort of luck *you* want it for, Charlie."

"Well, Mr. Bones, what sort of luck do I want it for?"

"*You* win, Smithie," one of the other players said. "We all know what sort o' luck ole Charlie wants your dollar for: he wants it for luck with the dames."

"Well, I might," Charlie admitted not displeased. "I haven't been so lucky that way lately—not so dog-gone lucky!"

All of his guests, except one, laughed at this; but Collinson frowned, still staring at the marked dollar. For a reason he could not have put into words just then, it began to seem almost vitally important to him to own this coin if he could, and to prevent Charlie Loomis from getting possession of it. The jibe, "He wants it for luck with the dames," rankled in Collinson's mind: somehow it seemed to refer to his wife.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Smithie," he said. "I'll bet two dollars against that dollar of yours that I hold a higher hand next deal than you do."

"Here! Here!" Charlie remonstrated. "Shack rules! Ten-cent limit."

"That's only for the game," Collinson said, turning upon his host with a sudden sharpness. "This is an outside bet between Smithie and me. Will you do it, Smithie? Where's your sporting spirit?"

So liberal a proposal at once roused the spirit to which it appealed. "Well, I might, if some o' the others 'll come in too, and make it really worth my while."

"I'm in," the host responded with prompt inconsistency; and others of the party, it appeared, were desirous of owning the talisman. They laughed and said it was "crazy stuff," yet they all "came in," and, for the first time in the history of this "shack," what Mr. Loomis called "real money," was seen upon the table as a stake. It was won, and the silver dollar with it, by the largest and oldest of the gamesters, a fat man with a walrus moustache that inevitably made him known in this circle as "Old Bill." He smiled condescendingly, and would have put the dollar in his pocket with the "real money," but Mr. Loomis protested.

"Here! What you doin'?" he shouted, catching Old Bill by the arm. "Put that dollar back on the table."

"What for?"

"What *for*? Why, we're goin' to play for it again. Here's two dollars against it I beat you on the next hand."

"No," said Old Billy calmly. "It's worth more than two dollars to me. It's worth five."

"Well, five then," his host returned. "I want that dollar!"

"So do I," said Collinson. "I'll put in five dollars if you do."

"Anybody else in?" Old Bill inquired, dropping the coin on the table; and all of the others again "came in." Old Bill won again; but once more Charlie Loomis prevented him from putting the silver dollar in his pocket.

"Come on now!" Mr. Loomis exclaimed. "Anybody else but me in on this for five dollars next time?"

"I am," said Collinson, swallowing with a dry throat; and he set forth all that remained to him of his twelve dollars. In return he received a pair of deuces, and the jubilant Charlie won.

He was vainglorious in his triumph. "Didn't that little luck piece just keep on tryin' to find the right man?" he cried, and read the inscription loudly. "Luck hurry back to me!" Righto! You're home where you belong, girlie! Now we'll settle down to our reg'lar little game again."

"Oh, no," said Old Bill. "You wouldn't let me keep it. Put it out there and play for it again."

"I won't. She's mine now."

"I want my luck piece back myself," said Smithie. "Put it out and play for it. You made Old Bill."

"I won't do it."

"Yes, you will," Collinson said, and he spoke without geniality. "You put it out there."

"Oh, yes, I will," Mr. Loomis returned mockingly. "I will for ten dollars."

"Not I," said Old Bill. "Five is foolish enough." And Smithie agreed with him. "Nor me!"

"All right, then. If you're afraid of ten, I keep it. I thought the ten'd scare you."

"Put that dollar on the table," Collinson said. "I'll put ten against it."

There was a little commotion among these mild gamesters; and someone said: "You're crazy, Collie. What do you want to do that for?"

"I don't care," said Collinson. "That dollar's already cost me enough, and I'm going after it."

"Well, you see, I want it, too," Charlie Loomis retorted cheerfully; and he appealed to the others. "I'm not askin' him to put up ten against it, am I?"

"Maybe not," Old Bill assented. "But how long is this thing goin' to keep on? It's already balled our game all up, and if we keep on foolin' with these side bets, why, what's the use?"

"My goodness!" the host exclaimed. "*I'm* not pushin' this thing, am I? I don't want to risk my good old luck piece, do I? It's Collie that's crazy to go on, ain't it?" He laughed. "He hasn't showed his money yet, though, I notice, and this old shack is run on strickly cash principles. I don't believe he's got ten dollars more on him!"

"Oh, yes, I have."

"Let's see it then."

Collinson's nostrils distended a little, but he said nothing, fumbled in his pocket, and then tossed the one hundred dollar bill, rather crumpled, upon the table.

"Great heavens!" shouted Old Bill. "Call the doctor: I'm all of a swoon!"

"Look at what's spilled over our nice clean table!" another said, in an awed voice. "Did you claim he didn't have *ten* on him, Charlie?"

"Well, it's nice to look at," Smithie observed. "But I'm with Old Bill. How long are you two goin' to keep this thing

goin'? If Collie wins the luck piece I suppose Charlie'll bet him fifteen against it, and then——"

"No, I won't," Charlie interrupted. "Ten's the limit."

"Goin' to keep on bettin' ten against it all night?"

"No," said Charlie. "I tell you what I'll do with you, Collinson; we both of us seem kind o' set on this luck piece, and you're already out some on it. I'll give you a square chance at it and at catchin' even. It's twenty minutes after nine. I'll keep on these side bets with you till ten o'clock, but when my clock hits ten, we're through, and the one that's got it then keeps it, and no more foolin'. You want to do that, or quit now? I'm game either way."

"Go ahead and deal," said Collinson. "Whichever one of us has it at ten o'clock, it's his, and we quit!"

But when the little clock on Charlie's green painted mantelshelf struck ten, the luck piece was Charlie's and with it an overwhelming lien on the one hundred dollar bill. He put both in his pocket. "Remember this ain't my fault; it was you that insisted," he said, and handed Collinson four five-dollar bills as change.

Old Bill, platonically interested, discovered that his cigar was sparkless, applied a match, and casually set forth his opinion. "Well, I guess that was about as poor a way of spendin' eighty dollars as I ever saw, but it all goes to show there's truth in the old motto that anything at all can happen in any poker game! That was a mighty nice hundred dollar bill you had on you, Collie; but it's like what Smithie said: a piece o' money goes hoppin' around from one person to another—it don't care!—and yours has gone and hopped to Charlie. The question is: Who's it goin' to hop to next?" He paused to laugh, glanced over the cards that had been dealt him, and concluded: "My guess is 't some good-lookin' woman'll prob'ly get a pretty fair chunk o' that hundred dollar bill out o' Charlie. Well, let's settle down to the ole army game."

They settled down to it, and by twelve o'clock (the invariable closing hour of these pastimes in the old shack) Collinson had lost four dollars and thirty cents more. He was commiserated by his fellow gamesters as they put on their coats and overcoats, preparing to leave the hot little rooms. They shook their heads, laughed ruefully in sym-

pathy, and told him he oughtn't to carry hundred dollar bills upon his person when he went out among friends. Old Bill made what is sometimes called an unfortunate remark.

"Don't worry about Collie," he said, jocosely. "That hundred dollar bill prob'ly belonged to some rich client of his."

"What!" Collinson said, staring.

"Never mind, Collie; I wasn't in earnest," the joker explained. "Of course I didn't mean it."

"Well, you oughtn't to say it," Collinson protested. "People say a thing like that about a man in a joking way, but other people hear it sometimes and don't know they're joking, and a story gets started."

"My goodness, but you're serious!" Old Bill exclaimed. "You look like you had a misery in your chest, as the rubes say; and I don't blame you! Get on out in the fresh night air and you'll feel better."

He was mistaken, however; the night air failed to improve Collinson's spirits as he walked home alone through the dark and chilly streets. There was, indeed, a misery in his chest, where stirred a sensation vaguely nauseating; his hands were tremulous and his knees infirm as he walked. In his mind was a confusion of pictures and sounds, echoes from Charlie Loomis's shack: he could not clear his mind's eye of the one hundred dollar bill; and its likeness, as it lay crumpled on the green cloth under the drop light, haunted and hurt him as a face in a coffin haunts and hurts the new mourner.

It seemed to Collinson then that money was the root of all evil and the root of all good, the root and branch of all life, indeed. With money, his wife would have been amiable, not needing gay bachelors to take her to vaudeville. Her need of money was the true foundation of the jealousy that had sent him out morose and reckless to-night; of the jealousy that had made it seem, when he gambled with Charlie Loomis for the luck dollar, as though they really gambled for luck with her.

It still seemed to him that they had gambled for luck with her, and Charlie had won it. But as Collinson plodded homeward in the chilly midnight, his shoulders sagging and his head drooping, he began to wonder how he could have risked money that belonged to another man. What on earth had

made him do what he had done? Was it the mood his wife had set him in as he went out that evening? No; he had gone out feeling like that often enough, and nothing had happened.

Something had brought this trouble on him, he thought; for it appeared to Collinson that he had been an automaton, having nothing to do with his own actions. He must bear the responsibility for them; but he had not willed them. If the one hundred dollar bill had not happened to be in his pocket—— That was it! And at the thought he mumbled desolately to himself: "I'd been all right if it hadn't been for that." If the one hundred dollar bill had not happened to be in his pocket, he'd have been "all right." The one hundred dollar bill had done this to him. And Smithie's romancing again came back to him: "In one person's hands money'll do good, likely; in another's it'll do harm." It was the money that did harm or good, not the person; and the money in his hands had done this harm to himself.

He had to deliver a hundred dollars at the office in the morning, somehow; for he dared not take the risk of the client's meeting the debtor.

There was a balance of seventeen dollars in his bank, and he could pawn his watch for twenty-five, as he knew well enough, by experience. That would leave fifty-eight dollars to be paid, and there was only one way to get it. His wife would have to let him pawn her ring. She'd *have to*!

Without any difficulty he could guess what she would say and do when he told her of his necessity: and he knew that never in her life would she forego the advantage over him she would gain from it. He knew, too, what stipulations she would make, and he had to face the fact that he was in no position to reject them. The one hundred dollar bill had cost him the last vestiges of mastery in his own house; and Charlie Loomis had really won not only the bill and the luck, but the privilege of taking Collinson's wife to vaudevilles. And it all came back to the same conclusion: The one hundred dollar bill had done it to him. "What kind of a thing *is* this life?" Collinson mumbled to himself, finding matters wholly perplexing in a world made into tragedy at the caprice of a little oblong slip of paper.

Then, as he went on his way to wake his wife and face her

with the soothing proposal to pawn her ring early the next morning, something happened to Collinson. Of itself the thing that happened was nothing, but he was aware of his folly as if it stood upon a mountain top against the sun—and so he gathered knowledge of himself and a little of the wisdom that is called better than happiness.

His way was now the same as upon the latter stretch of his walk home from the office that evening. The smoke fog had cleared, and the air was clean with a night wind that moved briskly from the west; in all the long street there was only one window lighted, but it was sharply outlined now, and fell as a bright rhomboid upon the pavement before Collinson. When he came to it he paused, at the hint of an inward impulse he did not think to trace; and, frowning, he perceived that this was the same shop window that had detained him on his homeward way, when he had thought of buying a toy for the baby.

The toy was still there in the bright window: the gay little acrobatic monkey that would climb up or down a red string as the string slacked or straightened; but Collinson's eye fixed itself upon the card marked with the price: "35 cents."

He stared and stared. "Thirty-five cents!" he said to himself. "Thirty-five cents!"

Then suddenly he burst into loud and prolonged laughter.

The sound was startling in the quiet night, and roused the interest of a meditative policeman who stood in the darkened doorway of the next shop. He stepped out, not unfriendly.

"What *you* havin' such a good time over, this hour o' the night?" he inquired. "What's all the joke?"

Collinson pointed to the window. "It's that monkey on the string," he said. "Something about it struck me as mighty funny!"

So, with a better spirit, he turned away, still laughing, and went home to face his wife.

NICE NEIGHBOURS

BY MARY S. WATTS

From Harper's

GUIDING the possible tenant about the house, Miss Wilcox pointed out its desirable features in a dry little monotone that gave no hint, she hoped, of her inward taut anxiety. She could not have achieved the persuasive enthusiasm of the young man from the real-estate office even if she had thought it becoming to a gentlewoman. Apparently he could see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil; there was something abnormal about his incapacities; he was magnificent, but at moments Miss Martha feared that he was not strictly conscientious. And besides, to what end shutting his eyes and thereby perhaps influencing others to shut theirs against unhappy facts? Truth will out. The house *was* old; the floors *did* need refinishing; the front-parlour fireplace *did* smoke——

"Them ceilings sure are high!" ejaculated the possible tenant, cocking a measuring eye heavenward.

"Y-yes, they *are* high," Miss Martha admitted helplessly. At this familiar—and perfectly just—criticism the agent always burst into flaming eulogies of high ceilings. Just the thing for our summer climate, our super-heated furnaces in winter! Tell you, the old-timers knew how to build for comfort! Miss Martha shrank from conjecturing what he said when ceilings were low. This whole experience illuminated depressingly the practice current in what it was the modern shibboleth to call "big business," she thought.

"Well, eight-five per is a whole lotta money," said the possible tenant. She gazed round indifferently as they stepped out on the little side porch; then all at once her expression altered with surprise and interest. She clutched

Miss Wilcox's arm, holding her back with an energetic whisper of warning. "Sh-h! See that bird? See him? Washing himself in that old pedestal washstand somebody's left out there? If that ain't the cutest thing! He's just sloshin' right in like a person, you 'r I 'r anybody. Like it was put there just on purpose for him!"

"Why, it was. It's a birds' bath, you know," said Miss Martha, somewhat startled, fumbling for her eyeglasses; the pretty spectacle was no novelty to her, yet it never lost its charm. "Oh, that's one of the thrushes. They must have a nest somewhere near——"

"Sh-h!" the other interrupted peremptorily. "There's another one goin' in!" She tiptoed to the edge of the porch and stood there entranced, following the movements of the birds, a vague smile irradiating her worn, sharpened, insignificant features. The shoving and spattering and small outcry finally subsided, the last robin hopped out, spinning the moisture from his feathers with quick wings; and she turned away reluctantly, drawing a long breath in childishly frank delight. "What d'you know about that, huh? I wouldn'ta believed they'd do that, take a bath that way. You couldn'ta *made* me believe it? I don't know much about 'em, but I always *have* liked 'em. Birds, I mean, and—well, dogs and all kinds of regular pets, you know. I always did like 'em. Say, you got your grounds fixed up real nice, ain't you? I like flowers, too."

She went down the steps, and Miss Wilcox trailed after, resigned to seeing the garden butchered to make a possible tenant's holiday; but the visitor moved about carefully, without offering to pluck or mishandle, and paused at last in the middle of the tidy plot, surveying its beds and borders with full appreciation. Then she wheeled to appraise again the mid-Victorian house whose stark tastelessness and characterlessness no garden setting could relieve; and Miss Martha's heart sank.

"The neighbourhood's very nice," she murmured desperately; this ladylike insinuation went to the limits of propriety in salesmanship according to Miss Martha's code. "So—so *permanent*. The church on the corner and the parsonage next door. It will always be nice. Everybody likes it so much on that account—that is——" She could get

no farther, overcome by a hideous sense of disloyalty to this same neighbourhood whose select character she was exploiting. For, looking upon her, the conviction would not down that Mrs. Shields, if a possible tenant, was abysmally impossible otherwise. She must be near Miss Martha's own age, yet was dressed, tinted, bedizened as if sixteen; there was a kind of withered pertness about her; she had a trick of glancing sidewise with her large, shadowed eyes in a style of roguish challenge and invitation combined; and her disturbingly frequent and facile smile suggested somehow a mere embellishment, obvious and inexpressive as her rouge. Such a figure in the rarefied atmosphere of Saint Luke's was unthinkable; but here she was, Martha Wilcox, making capital out of that proximity with all its implications. Contact with "big business" had done its debasing work! "Of course, the music might be an objection," she faltered, conscience-struck. "And sometimes one can hear Doctor Gowdy quite distinctly on Sundays in warm weather when the windows are open."

"Music? Oh, you mean hymns?" queried Mrs. Shields. "Doctor Gowdy's the preacher, huh? I went to Billy Sunday once. Tell you, the rev'rend'd have to go some to beat *him*! Well, I don' know—eighty-five—" She hesitated, looking around the genteel landscape; then faced Miss Martha with the air of giving up argument, not without wonder and some amusement at herself. "Well, I guess them birds has got me going. I guess you've rented a house!"

Miss Wilcox, comprehending her expression rather than the words, stood dumb for an instant in half-incredulous relief. The thing was almost too good to be true, coming to pass with this uncanny suddenness. Eighty-five dollars a month and the hopeless old place off her hands at last! All the dreams which even in the act of dreaming she had stigmatized as rank folly, revisited her in flashing procession: having her hair "permanented," going to Atlantic City, buying a fur coat—how often had she spent that rainbow gold! This time it was real. There would be only the pleasing care of letting it accumulate for a while. She awoke to new apprehensions. "I—I suppose there will be things to do? Changes? I mean you will want——?"

Mrs. Shields applied the decorative smile to her face.

"Oh, my, no, I don't want nothin'. The house is just swell, and anyways I never was one to keep running to people for new wallpaper, and ever' little thing that needs fixing. I like to keep things up my own self. I'm awful easy to get along with," she assured her prospective landlady eagerly. Miss Martha, who had been recalling terrifying tales she had had from more than one earnest friend about the misdemeanours and the tyrannous exactions of the average tenant, breathed freely again. It began to seem a leisurely, congenial, and singularly profitable occupation to rent houses as the patient waiting and many disappointments of the last six months retired to the background of her memories. Mrs. Shields, meanwhile, fluttered up and down the garden, already assuming innocent airs of proprietorship.

"You gotta tell me where at you get a bird bath like that, 'cause that's what I'm gonna have the first thing!" she proclaimed with enthusiasm. "Never you mind! It'll all be took good care of, and I won't change a thing. It's so nice the way it is, all clean and quiet and kinda restful. I got the same old-style notions as you. I'm crazy about having a real refined home."

Miss Wilcox, not for the first time, wished that the questionably adaptable young man from the real-estate office were there; he would know what to say. "You're a stranger here?" she ventured at length.

"Oh, I've lived lotsa places," said the other, smiling blankly. "Is that as far as the yard goes to, that fence, with the vines on? My, they grow thick, don't they?"

They did indeed, forming a broad, tangled breastwork of honeysuckle and rambler roses valued by Miss Martha for being comely to the view in blooming time and all the year round an impregnable defence against boys and other animals. Mrs. Shields, craning slightly to peer over it, inspected the adjoining territory with her naively open curiosity; she gave an exclamation. "For Pete's sake! Didn't you tell me that's where the preacher lives?"

"Doctor Gowdy. Yes," said Miss Martha, a little uncomfortable.

"Keeps it lovely, don't he? Just like this side!"

Miss Martha perceived that this was to be taken in an ironic sense; making every allowance for the other's idiosyn-

crasies of speech and manner, it was impossible that she could be in earnest. Even the most stalwart members of his congregation had been overheard to express themselves unfavourably about Doctor Gowdy's yard. "Well—a clergyman, you know—he's so busy. Besides, one really ought not to expect him—— And Mrs. Gowdy——They have quite a family. It's almost impossible for her to keep a servant. Even coloured——"

"They got a coon in the kitchen now. I can see her," said Mrs. Shields.

"Er—yes—but often there isn't anybody. It makes a great deal of work for poor Mrs. Gowdy. She can't see to everything outside as well as in," said Miss Wilcox, nervously, conscious that her explanations amounted to an apology; it annoyed her. And now the coon in the kitchen unwittingly added to the embarrassments of the situation by shoving up the window-screen and flinging an over-ripe tomato in the general direction of the ministerial garbage can; it fell short, spattering seeds and pulp; the coon—she was a strapping, coffee-coloured slattern—regarded it absently a moment while she wrung out a leprous-looking rag, sent a sharp glance toward the audience on the other side of the fence, and slammed down the screen, slouching back to her labours at a sink full of dishes.

"Mrs. Gowdy simply can't see to everything," Miss Martha repeated feebly. She awaited the other's further comment in something of a panic; but Mrs. Shields had none to make. Her gaze, as it roved round the unkempt enclosure, was one of complete detachment. She was turning away when melodious, preluding chords on the piano sounded from within the parsonage, and Mrs. Gowdy's pleasant soprano uplifted in "Angels ever bright and fair." She sang with taste and feeling, but Miss Martha uneasily wished that she had not begun just at this moment; it was inopportune, somehow.

"That's some of that music you was scairt I wouldn't like, huh? Why, it ain't so bad!" said Mrs. Shields tolerantly. "Anyway, I never let nothing the neighbours does worry me much," she added, glancing again, perhaps involuntarily, at the Gowdy premises. "Live and let live. I always say. Oh, say, look what's coming!"

It was a little procession of the Gowdy children round the corner of the house, Thomas junior in the lead, shouldering a spade and issuing bluff words of command; Florence came next, with a black silk petticoat, evidently borrowed from some much more mature wardrobe than her own, solemnly draped upon her; the twins were hauling the catafalque, that is, their Irish-Mail wagon, a shoe-box disposed upon it and covered with an unbelievably dirty towel; and Wilbur, straddling his kiddie-car, theoretically brought up the rear. In reality, he tooled along to suit himself, with erratic swoops and circles, carrying on an inarticulate, one-sided conversation the while. They halted, after some shrill disagreements, at one of the bare, hard-trodden spots occurring sporadically among the weeds of the parsonage back yard, and Tommie was about to attack it with the spade when all hands simultaneously became aware of the uninvited witnesses. There was an interval of silent staring broken by Wilbur, who, as has been seen, was a sociable soul, without sufficient field for the exercise of his gift.

"O, 'ady!" said he, steering up to the fence.

"My, my, ain't you little folks busy, though!" said Mrs. Shields genially. "Watch out, buddy, you'll get a sticker in your eye. What's he say?"

"O, 'ady!" cried Wilbur with vehemence.

Tom authoritatively advised him to shut up. "'Hello, lady!' that's what he's trying to say. He can't talk plain yet, he's only two and a half. We've got to be after him the whole time. It's fierce!" he explained gloomily.

"Well, now, *I* think that's real nice, taking care of your little brother——"

"Icky eye!" interrupted Wilbur urgently. "Icky eye!"

Florence undertook the translation. "He's saying the kitty died."

"Oh, ain't that too bad! Poor kitty! What was the matter with her?"

"I don't know. She just died," said Florence indifferently.

"We're having a funeral with her."

"You *are*? Well, I declare! And I s'pose Mommer's singing that lovely hymn for you."

They eyed her in the wary fashion of children suspicious of the false interest of grown-ups. "No, she isn't. She's

just singing." Tom said curtly. "I don't b'lieve she knows about the kitty even."

Here the auburn-haired twin precipitately entered the conversation with the information that the bird died, too. "It was a canary. It sang and sang, and then it stopped singing and died."

"Oh, my, you musta felt bad!"

"Ho, that ain't anything!" said the blue-eyed twin in a superior manner. "We've had lots of things die. Just lots!" He launched into large statements. "Everything we get dies! We had some white mice and *they* died, and we had a dog and *it* died, and we had——"

"Aw, shut up, we didn't any such thing!"

"We did so! Don't we, Flo, have everything die? Don't we, Reddy?"

"Aw, you're lying! Shut up, I tell you!"

Mrs. Shields intervened on the side of peace and propriety. "Now, now, don't you kids get to scrapping. You go ahead and have your funeral, and play nice and pretty. First thing you know you'll have Mommer out here, scairt to death for fear some of you has got their neck broke, hollerin' like that."

"Aw, she won't hear, she never does," growled Thomas junior. And in fact, the voice and piano, now sweetly rilling arpeggios throughout all the keys in ardent practice, kept on undisturbed. Mrs. Shields retreated, joining Miss Martha with confidences uttered in a voice of polite caution.

"I expect them young ones are right nice-looking when they're washed up. They're all right, only I don't know as I'm keen for 'em to come over on my side of the fence. Of course, Mrs. Rev'rend, she's used to the racket and muss."

She asked whether she was to pay in advance, briskly announcing that she would while Miss Martha was still hanging in timorous indecision. The maiden lady moved in a haze of doubt and awe in what she considered the business world; out-of-hand offers to pay rent in advance might be one of its pitfalls for what Miss Martha knew. But in due time the check arrived, and though intrinsically an unhandsome document executed in weak, loosely flowing figures and handwriting with the signature "Tillie Shields" sidling downhill into the corner, it was negotiable like any other

check. Eighty-five dollars! The dream had come true! Miss Martha was thriftily resolved not to spend it this first time, but it gave her a solid foundation on which to erect more dreams. Moreover, she took an almost equally solid satisfaction in replying coolly and competently to all inquirers, yes, the house was rented; yes, very advantageously, thank you! Hitherto she had had to endure their discouraging sympathy; and now detected, in spite of the felicitations, the great fundamental truth that nobody is really glad when somebody else gets a house rented! Eliza Seabury was the one exception; Eliza was too blunt-minded and blunt-spoken for civil pretenses. She rushed up on the street one day, and opened the subject, or in a manner of speaking, committed assault and battery on it with: "Martha Wilcox, where on earth did you pick up that weird woman you've got in your house?"

"I didn't pick her up at all. She saw the advertisement," said Miss Martha, a trifle stiffly.

"Well, she's positively *weird*. I saw her the other day, and when somebody said she was in your house I nearly passed away. Her clothes! And those eyes rolling around like two buckeyes in a pan of milk! It's simply *weird*! Who is she, anyhow, and where did she come from?"

"She's a Mrs. Matilda Shields," said Miss Martha, sagely correcting that too informal "Tillie." "I don't know where her home was originally. I understood she'd travelled about a good deal."

"Mercy, Martha, I hope you didn't take her without a reference. It would be awful if she didn't pay you."

"The bank said she was all right," said Miss Martha triumphantly. The bank's endorsement was her trump card; it left criticism without a leg to stand on. She was prompted to testify to Mrs. Shields's credit on other grounds. "She's been very nice about the house, not finding fault and not asking for anything, you know."

"What, not a thing?" Mrs. Seabury exclaimed on a high note of astonishment. "That old rookery! Well, of course, I don't mean it's not a lovely house," she amended hastily. "Only naturally, you've never spent any more on it than you could help, I suppose. It's weird her not wanting *some* repairs. She can't be much of a housekeeper. Maybe

that's just as well, though. She won't mind living next door to the Gowdys. Has she ever said anything about them?"

"I haven't inquired," said Miss Martha, stiffening again.

"Oh, well, she probably will later on," Mrs. Seabury prophesied blithely; she was not a member of Saint Luke's congregation. "Unless she's a saint, she'll have trouble over the ashes or the garbage or the children or something."

Mrs. Shields, however, was apparently bent on justifying her claim to being "awful easy to get along with," if that phrase connotes living quietly and seeking no one's acquaintance. She went about domestic duties with an extraordinary zest, cooked, cleaned, ran up and down stairs endlessly; and spent hours in the garden applying her patently unskilled energies to weeding and trimming it, or motionless in some coign of vantage, watching the birds. Except for these robins and jays and an occasional squirrel, she had no visitors, and defeated expectations by never publicly falling foul of the Gowdy ash-heap, the Gowdy garbage, or the Gowdy children, whatever her private attitude toward them. Mrs. Gowdy, with characteristic sweet thoughtfulness—everybody acclaimed her as the ideal wife for a clergyman—introduced herself over the hedge after a few days with a smiling word or two about the other's courage in coming to live alongside such a houseful. "We used to be afraid our youngsters were a good deal of a trial to Miss Wilcox."

"I don't mind 'em, only when it sounds like somebody was getting hurt," said Mrs. Shields, whereat the experienced mother began to laugh.

"Oh, children are always getting hurt, you know. Mine seem to be made of steel and india-rubber. They stand everything. Luella—that's the maid I have now—worries over them more than I do! She's so good with them, and perfectly devoted to Wilbur, especially."

Mrs. Shields looked at her uncertainly.

"Well, Luella ain't always on the job, is she? I don't see how she can be."

"Oh, yes, she's very efficient. I hardly ever give an order. Sometimes coloured people are like that, wonderful with children and about the housework too." With other agree-

able generalities, she moved away; and Mrs. Shields, after a speculative stare at the retreating back, shook her own overdressed head soberly, and moved away, too.

It happened that she did not encounter Doctor Gowdy until some time later, on an occasion which turned out to be more or less momentous. Pottering about among the flower beds, she heard without heeding a piping excitement in the other back yard, and only looked across at last when a heavier voice was added to the children's. "Now, we must have a coop, you know, boys. They have to be kept in a coop," Doctor Gowdy was expounding. "Let's see! What shall we do? Oh, I'll tell you! There's that old peach crate over there; you get that, Robbie, and I shouldn't wonder if Tom could nail some strips up the sides. Everybody must help, that's the only way to get along——" he kept on fluently in his trained, carrying voice, while the boys circled about, squabbling over his directions. Then, as he caught Mrs. Shields's eye, smiled with a gesture toward the basket in his hands.

"Day-old chicks. Wouldn't you like to see them?" And in the direct, hearty way which everybody so liked, without any ado of formalities, he came over, the children hanging on and hampering him. The basket was full of soft cheepings and movement; looking down into it, one got an impression of little round, animated, cuddling patches of brown velvet, striped with yellow, of little yellow heads and eyes with the bright fixity of beads. Mrs. Shields exclaimed delightedly.

"Aren't they cunning?" said the minister in sympathetic pleasure. "The kiddies and I—we're great pals, all of us together, you know—we're going to make a coop and raise them. First thing you know, we'll have a regular chicken farm!"

Mrs. Shields looked at his kind, eager face, at the basket of chickens, at the surging children, at the littered yard, and spoke diffidently. "Well, they're awful cute, but—I guess it's kinda work to bring up chickens, ain't it? I mean I thought people got all fixed for it, and didn't do nothing else."

"Oh, no, you just feed and water them," said Doctor Gowdy buoyantly. "They *'do the rest'*—hey? Ha, ha!" He dropped to a confidential tone. "It will be good for

the children. Teaches them practical humanity—Joe, Florence, stop it! You can't both of you play with the same chicken!"

Mrs. Shields returned to her gardening with an oddly dubious expression. Judging by what she could hear, the coop was finally erected to everybody's satisfaction, and after an hour or so of vociferous children and chickens, the latter appeared to lose their charm of novelty temporarily, at least. There was quiet in both back yards; she was trowelling industriously around the roots of a rosebush when Wilbur was brought downstairs from his nap, and released from the house; and directly his voice arose in gleeful squealings. "Chicky! Chicky!"

Mrs. Shields straightened up, listened a second, looked over the hedge. What she saw caused her to drop the trowel and fly around to the alley, bursting through the tumbledown gate into the parsonage grounds without ceremony. "Wilbur! *Wilbur!* Don't do that! Don't grab the chickies, dearie! No, no! Mustn't touch!"

"Make chicky go!" shouted Wilbur happily, squeezing a limp bit of brown velvet between his sturdy little hands. The coop was upset; he danced with joyful impatience among splintered slats and chickens. "Chicky *go!*" He threw it down and kicked it. "*Go!*"

The chicken made a difficult movement, then settled down motionless with filming eyes. "There now, see what you done! You've broke the chicky, Wilbur. Poor chicky, now it won't ever go any more!" said Mrs. Shields, instinctively adapting her words to the child's comprehension. "No, *no*, Wilbur mustn't play with chickies!"

"Chicky go!" screamed Wilbur. He was too quick for her; the chicken that he aimed a lusty kick at escaped, but losing his balance and recovering, he came down vigorously with his whole weight on another. "*Make chicky go!*"

All at once with dynamic suddenness, Mrs. Shield's aspect underwent an appalling transformation. Red spots flamed through the rouge on her meagre cheeks; her eyes ceased to languish; they glared balefully. In a twinkling she became years older, a formidable virago, a hag! She darted out a tentacle of an arm, and whirled Wilbur away from his pastime with a couple of stinging slaps. "You let them chickens

alone, young one, you hear me? You won't, won't you? I'll learn you!"

Wilbur raised a long howl of protest, exerting fists and feet impotently; Luella appeared at the kitchen door alarmed and inquiring, and after one look, charged to the rescue. "Wha' you doin' t' that chile? Don't you dare tech that chile!"

Mrs. Shields hurled at her an epithet foreign to the vocabularies of real refined homes; the mulatto woman, in a fury, screeched a retort as flavoursome; linguistically it was a battle of giants. Wilbur bawled between them; what chickens survived scattered, peeping wildly, the conflict assailed the very vault of heaven. At that pitch it actually brought Mrs. Cowdy from the piano and "Hark, the herald angels sing"; the rest of the children arrived in a scurry; the postman halted on his round, petrified; a stray delivery boy, lingering, impartially contributed his mite, "Yah-de-dah! Yee-i! Yee-i!" he yelped ecstatically, and drifted on, a ship that passed in the night.

Wilbur fled to his mother, bellowing more in fright and anger than pain; she received him with bewildered tenderness. "What is it? What has happened? Tell Mother where it hurts, darling!" She gazed round distractedly, seeking to interpret the blubbering and unintelligible references to *ady* and *chicky*. "What is he trying to say? Luella——?"

Luella plunged into dramatic recital with an effect of being all eyeballs and incredibly rapid jaws. "—An' Mis' Gowdy, nex' thing Ah heah'd Wilbuh hollerin' an' Ah come runnin' an' heah she was lammin' him lak he was her own chile! An' Ah ain't gwine tek no talk lak she done give me offa no white lady!"

"Hush, Luella, please——!"

"I'm real sorry I smacked the little fella," said Mrs. Shields. Her ire had flickered out as suddenly as it exploded; she spoke in visible distress and remorse. "I didn't go to hurt him, just to make him mind. I only wanted to stop him stompin' and slammin' them chickens. I—I just plumb couldn't stand it. You look what he done, Mis' Gowdy, you just look. You wouldn'ta left him do that yourself if you'd been here."

Mrs. Gowdy clicked regretfully, viewing the massacre.

"Tst! Tst! Why, Wilbur, did you hurt the chickies? Did mother's little boy do that? Don't you remember mother's often told you you mustn't hurt *anything*?"

"Make chicky go?" Wilbur suggested with reviving spirits. "Make *go*, mamma?"

"No, Wilbur, can't. My little boy must be kind to dumb animals," said Mrs. Gowdy in gentle reproof.

"He's too little, he can't understand, he don't know any better. It ain't any use *telling* him; there'd oughta be somebody after him," argued Mrs. Shields desperately. "I'm awful sorry, but I just *had* to make him quit it. I know I hadn't no right to, but——"

"Yes? Yes!" said Mrs. Gowdy vaguely but forgivingly. The older children stood around in a silence that conveyed a certain clannish hostility toward Mrs. Shields, yet no very lively sympathy for Wilbur. Luella retired sulkily, and Mrs. Gowdy looked after her with something as near anxiety as her placid countenance could express. "I do hope she won't leave!"

"Mis' Gowdy, I wouldn'ta done it, only there wasn't none of you round, and *somebody* had to!"

"Yes? Well, perhaps it would have been better to telephone in and tell me first. But never mind!" said Mrs. Gowdy kindly.

This episode resulted in a species of armed peace between the two households, or on Mrs. Shields's side at any rate. The others were either too magnanimous or too irresponsible to hold a grudge; they forgave and forgot even before the last of the chickens had come to its end one way or another, that is, within the next twenty-four hours. Mrs. Shields resolutely ignored their fate; she cleaned, gardened, spread meals for the birds with her back carefully turned on the church premises, and it was only by accident that from an upper window she caught a glimpse one day of another slatted box not far from where the wreckage of the first still lay, and of the family gathered around, peering in, reaching down into it, exclaiming. "Bunny! Bunny!" they chorused. Plainly, another course in humanity was being inaugurated. "My God!" said Mrs. Shields aloud, and turned away with a despairing philosophical shrug. At intervals for a week thereafter, escaping rabbits scudded through her yard, or

housed under the shrubbery, proceedings which she unaccountably never witnessed. "Your bunnies? No, I ain't seen none round here," she would assure the pursuing children with her meaningless smile; and when the animals were recaptured, exhibited none of the relief that might have been expected. But in a little while the incursions ceased; the rabbits were apparently disciplined to their prison. It stood in the same place, rain or shine, day after day, and the "Bunny, bunny" was heard with less and less frequency.

Perhaps sheer curiosity, perhaps some more creditable feeling at last overcame Mrs. Shield's self-enforced inhibitions; for one sultry afternoon when the family were all out on a swimming and picnicking expedition, conveyed in a parishioner's automobile, she guiltily slipped around through the alley into the other yard. There was one rabbit left of the pair; it lay on its side in one corner of the stifling pen, breathing hurriedly. Mrs. Shields cleaned out the pan in another corner and filled it with fresh water; she put a little store of lettuce leaves alongside. The creature turned a lack-lustre eye on her, without stirring. She stood awhile contemplating it, or it might be some purpose slowly forming in her mind. "For two cents I'd let you out," she remarked finally. "Only you're so sick and weak you can't get away. So *that* wouldn't be any use!" She pondered awhile longer, then with an air of decision, marched back into her own house and sat down to the telephone. With her hand on the instrument, she seemed to waver, reconsidering; then with a defiant gesture, snatched the receiver off the hook.

A complacent patriot would have looked upon succeeding events as demonstrating conclusively an efficiency in public office which some other patriots are prone to question. Bright and early the next morning there presented himself at the parsonage front door a massive, elderly, decent, badged official, and incontinently agitated rumours filled the air. Luella might be heard declaiming violently; Doctor Gowdy, Mrs. Gowdy uplifted mild, startled argument; everybody united in silencing the children. A caucus was held in the back yard; and then the officer departed. It was most melodramatic and intriguing; there were communicants of Saint Luke's, not to mention innumerable outsiders, who

would have envied Mrs. Shields her proscenium-box location, but she herself took no advantage of it, and it was without alacrity that she answered the doorbell when the officer visited her in turn.

He touched his hat. "Good morning! Is this where the lady telephoned for the Humane S'ciety——?" He stopped short abruptly, staring, seeming to labour vainly with some stupendous fact well-nigh beyond his grasp. "Well, well, *well!* Look who's here!" he managed to get out, after a long minute.

Mrs. Shields did not answer; she stood before him, her bearing sullen, hostile, a little frightened.

"Look who's here!" the officer ejaculated again, apostrophizing the ceiling; then he brought his gaze down, and sent it everywhere, alertly exploring. "You living here?"

"Yeh. What's matter my living here? I gotta live *some* where. I ain't doin' nothing."

"Naw, I guess you ain't, Tillie, or everybody's heard before this," the other agreed amiably. "But say, was it you called the S'ciety, honest?"

"Yeh. What of it?"

"Why, nothin'. Nothin' 't all," said the official soothingly; a grin slowly worked its way across his features. "Only, it's kinda funny when you think about it, ain't it? Don't it strike you kinda funny?"

"It strikes me you was needed," said Mrs. Shields, glowering at him. "It strikes me you'n your old S'ciety better get busy."

"Sure, sure! We're going to. Only the rev'rend next door, and you sickin' the authorities onto him——" Some obscurely humorous aspect of the situation overcame him; he propped himself against the doorpost, shaken with chuckles.

"When you're through——?" said Mrs. Shields with chilly venom.

"Oh, all right! All right, Tillie!" He wiped his eyes, saluted her with burlesque obsequiousness, and went off down the walk; at the street another convulsion overtook him.

Miss Martha Wilcox, meanwhile, in contented ignorance of all these happenings, dreamed on, spending the rent, recounting it and spending it over again, Alnaschar-wise; with apolo-

gies to herself, she did actually spend some of it, here and there. It fairly burned a hole in her pocket, and there seemed no harm in a few small indulgences; she had gone without so long! But now Mrs. Seabury descended on her, headlong as usual, this time with a face of portentous gloom.

"Martha, have you *heard*? Oh, well, I know you *haven't* heard! That's the reason I'm here. It just got around to me, and I didn't wait a minute. I've come right over to tell you; it's the part of kindness. I mean about that woman you've got in your house. You haven't heard?"

Miss Martha anticipated battle, murder, and sudden death. "No. What is it? Is she——?"

"Oh, nothing's happened to her! Goodness, it's a great deal worse than *that*!" She lowered her voice with cautious glances right and left, though they were alone. "Martha, it's just got out who she is! You know everybody thought there was *something* the matter, she was so weird looking. Well, she's *notorious*! The notorious Tillie Shields, that's what they call her. You said her name was Matilda. Well, that's who she is!" Mrs. Seabury concluded, leaning back in triumph.

For an instant Miss Martha was conscious only of acute vexation. "Notorious *how*, Eliza? What way?" she stammered, groping for objections, refutations.

"Oh, for mercy's sake, the way they all are!" Mrs. Seabury rejoined in sharp impatience. "Well, to be sure, you've never been married," she added more leniently, and followed up this apparently irrelevant statement with others very much to the point. "She had a *place*—one of those *places*—in the red-light district, you know. It was a good while ago—I don't suppose she's really notorious any more, she's too old. But that's who she is, the notorious Tillie Shields."

Miss Martha, envisaging calamity, averted her mind in desperate unwillingness, desperate hope. "But how do you know? Who told you?"

"Why, Martha, it's all over! *Everybody's* heard! It seems she had a fuss with the Gowdy's cook over their cat or the birds or something——" Mrs. Seabury entered into graphic and approximately accurate details, winding up with: "And the officer used to be on the police force, so, of course,

he recognized her right away! I *told* you you oughtn't to have taken her without a reference."

"But the bank said——"

"Oh, the bank!" said Mrs. Seabury scornfully. "She probably keeps a big account there, and that's all they care about. It's awful to think how that money was made, but that's nothing to a bank.—Oh, nobody suspects *you* of knowing, Martha," she interrupted herself quickly, misreading her friend's silence. "Nobody would believe *that* of you for a minute. We all *know* you didn't know."

Poor Miss Wilcox, in horror, found herself for a moment wishing vehemently that nobody *knew*. All her castles lay in ruins; and there were those bills that had seemed so trifling, looming monumentally now! She must undertake the abhorrent duty of putting Mrs. Shields out; and where or when would she get another tenant? She went to the house, flinching in expectation of the encounter with this person whom she now classified with formless dread as *one of those women*; to be sure, previous experience had revealed nothing alarming about her, but now that Mrs. Shields knew herself discovered, it would undoubtedly be different. She did not answer the bell, and Miss Martha, worriedly investigating, at length came upon her in the back yard where she had just finished scrubbing and refilling the bird-bath. Leaning on the broom, she was awaiting the approach of a robin; she saw Miss Wilcox out of the corner of her eye, and made a slight arresting gesture. The bird came on, with a kind of wary confidence, his bright, sidewise glance fixed on her.

"He's just playing scairt. He knows me," Mrs. Shields whispered. "But *you* better keep back a second."

Miss Wilcox received a definite and most disconcerting shock. She had come prepared as conscious Virtue—and her logical opponent, conscious Vice, failed her! The notorious Tillie Shields did not look in the least notorious; she looked like an ignorant, dull, good-hearted woman, old and alone, cheaply pathetic with her paint and her terrific trade simper. It was with reluctance and difficulty that Miss Martha began to state her errand, but before she was half-way through, the other understood.

"I s'pose Pete Maguire's been talking," she said with a flash of resentful conviction. "Anyhow, I had a hunch I'd

get in bad, right when I was settin' there at the 'phone. I don't care! I'm glad I done it. I'd done it, even 'f I'd known for certain!"

"I'm sorry I have to ask you to—to move," Miss Martha began again, with miserable diffidence. "But I—I——"

"Oh, it's all right," said Tillie Shields, submissively. "I'll find some other place to go. I always find a place, for a while, anyhow." Obviously she spoke in no intention of enlisting sympathy; it was a mere statement of fact. Yet Miss Martha was remotely perturbed; and now, to her dismay, she saw the other's chin quiver and two tears tracking down the paint.

"I—I liked it awful well here. Them birds——" She swallowed hard, bringing her features under control with an effort. "Ever'thing's been took good care of. If it hadn't been for next door——" She began to talk impetuously; it was a childishly incoherent, confident outpouring. "Miss Wilcox, you *know* how they do! Miss Wilcox, I can't *see* how folks can do that way! That rabbit had a great sore on its side! And Doctor Gowdy's a *preacher!*" Her voice rose in rebellious bewilderment. "He—why, he talks beautiful in church—I've *heard* him——"

So had Miss Martha. Fragments of the doctor's noble and touching utterances on the text: "*Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*" inconveniently returned to her.

"I *can't see*——" Mrs. Shields reiterated helplessly. And neither could Martha Wilcox. The puzzle was too much for her. Nobody, not even the notorious Tillie Shields, had intentionally done any wrong, yet the cumulative result of all their acts seemed to be heartbreakingly wrong, somehow; she herself, were it not for needing the income, could have let Mrs. Shields live there for nothing—but she could not let her live there for eighty-five dollars a month!

"I'm so sorry——!" was all that she could say.

NOT WANTED

By JESSE LYNCH WILLIAMS

From Saturday Evening Post

PHIL had read it in a book. But life did not come true to literature. When they put his first-born in his arms a strange nausea suffused this father's frame and he handed the warm little bundle back to his sister hastily, as if it were hot.

"Take it away," he whispered to Mary. "I might break it."

And he bolted out of the room, for the doctor said he could see Nell now. The only joy he felt was over a less vain-glorious but more important matter than becoming a father. The beautiful brave mother was all right.

This young man had not wanted to become a father; not in the least. He and Junior's mother had been happy together. Now they would have to be happy apart, if at all, for whole years at a time, until Junior was big enough to stand trips to the wilds of Alaska or Africa or wherever else mining engineers had to go. Nell had always gone along until this usurper spoiled their life together. So Junior was really doing a scandalous thing, coming between husband and wife. No wonder that Phil had not wanted him.

Well, Junior's mother wanted him anyway. She wanted him terrifically, more than anything in the world except Junior's father. And as her husband wanted her to have everything she desired, why, probably it was all right. There was not much else that she had lacked.

Junior did not seem to understand that he wasn't wanted by his father and took to Phil from the first. "All babies do," said the jealous young aunt. "It's a great gift and it's wasted on a man." Mary was a maiden, but she had hopes.

"He's so big and so kind," said the contented mother. "Children, dogs, and old ladies always adore Phil."

With Junior it was clearly a case of love at first sight, and he did not act as if he were a victim of unrequited affection. For example, unlike a woman scorned, he had no fury for his father at all except when Phil left the room. Then he howled. His father could soothe him when even his mother failed, and Junior would settle down into Phil's arms with a sigh of voluptuous satisfaction, quite as if he belonged there; and of course, he did. That was the dismaying part about it to his father, who scowled and looked bored. This made the young mother laugh; and that in turn made Junior laugh, too, and look down at her from the eminence of his father's arms, as if trying to wink and say, "Rather a joke on the old man."

"I suppose I've got to do this all my life," said Phil.

"All your life," said Nell, rubbing it in; "but after a while you'll like it."

She had great faith in her son's charm.

Junior was five years old when his father came back from the Alaska project. He could not remember having met this grown-up before, but he might have said, "I have heard so much about you." His mother had told him. For example, his father was the best and bravest man in the world. Also, according to the same reliable authority, he loved Junior and his mother enormously and equally. He was far away, getting bread and butter for them. A wonderful person, a great big man, six feet two inches "and well proportioned," and such an honourable gentleman that—well, that was the only reason he was not coming home with a huge fortune, she explained. But at any rate he was coming home at last and would be awfully glad to see what a big boy Junior had become.

He was, but Phil had always been rather shy with strangers, and did not pay so much attention to his namesake as Junior had been led to expect. You see, everyone in this tyrant's kingdom worshipped him, and Junior assumed that his father would follow conventions. For every night before he went to sleep his father's name had invariably been mentioned first in the list of people and animals and playthings that loved him.

Junior, though quite small, was a great lover and much given to kissing. On momentous occasions, such as the start for the picnic the day after his father's arrival, Junior manifested his excitement by hugging and kissing everybody in sight, including the dogs. It was his earliest form of self-expression. His father, as it happened, was absorbed in packing the tea basket and had never been accustomed to being kissed while packing in camp. Besides, Junior had been helping his mother prepare the luncheon. That is, he had taken a hand in the distribution of guava jelly, and there was just one hardship in the life of this immaculate mining engineer he could never endure—sticky fingers. But Junior had not yet learned that, and so, taking advantage of his father's kneeling posture, he tackled him around the neck and indulged in passionate osculation.

"Call your child off," said Phil to Nell. She laughed.

"Come, precious, don't bore your father."

Junior did not know what that new word "bore" meant, but he released his father and transferred his demonstration to his mother. She never seemed to get too much and did not object to sweet fingers.

"Mamma," said Junior as they started off in the car, "I don't believe that man in front likes me."

"He adores you, darling; he's your father."

Well, it sounded reasonable, but he remembered the new word. That evening when they came home the dogs, not having been allowed to go on the picnic, thought it was their turn and jumped up on Phil with muddy paws. Junior took command of the situation and of the new word.

"Down, Rex!" he said to the sentimental setter. "Don't bore my father." And he pulled Rex away by the tail.

At bedtime, when the nurse came to bear him off, he raised his arms to Phil.

"Can I bore you now?"

Phil laughed and kissed him good night.

"Funny little cuss, isn't he?" said Phil.

"He's a very unusual child," said this very unusual Mother.

"Unusually ugly, you mean."

But he couldn't get a rise out of Nell.

"Oh, you'll learn to appreciate him yet."

Shortly before Phil left for his next trip the paternal passion had its way with this reserved father, for once. Some little street boys, as they were technically classified by the nurse, had been ordered off the drive by Junior, who was playing out there alone. They did not like his aristocratic manner and rolled him in the mud. They were pommelling him in spite of his protests, when Phil heard the outcry and, getting a glimpse of the unequal contest from the library window, gave forth a shout that made the intruders take to their heels, the infuriated father after them.

As he raced down the drive he saw the wide-eyed animal terror on his child's face and it aroused within him an animal emotion of another kind, one he had never felt before, though he had often seen it exhibited by wild beasts—usually the mothers. It was a lust to destroy those two little boys, to render them extinct. He might have done so too; but fortunately they had a good start, and by the time he caught up with them civilization caught up with him sufficiently to make him realize what century he was living in. So, with a few vigorous cuffs and an angry warning, he hastened back to his bleating offspring, recognizing with astonishment and some alarm how near blind parental rage can bring a man to murder.

Junior was not so much damaged as his white clothes were, but his childish terror was pitiful. He rushed into his father's arms and clung, quivering. Phil held him close.

"There, there, it's all right now. I won't let anybody hurt you."

Without realizing it, this fastidious father was kissing an extremely dirty face again and again. Junior, still sobbing convulsively, clung closer.

"You'll always be on my side, won't you, Father?"

"You bet I will!" said Phil. "You're my own darling little boy."

He had had no intention of saying things quite like that, and didn't know that he could; but it sounded all right to Junior. This moment was to be one of those vivid recollections that last through a lifetime.

With a final long-drawn sigh of complete and passionate comfort, the small boy looked up into the big man's face and smiled.

"You love me now, don't you, Father?" he said.

"You bet I love you!"

The boy had got him at last. But perhaps Junior presumed upon this new privilege. The next morning he awoke with a bad dream about those street boys, and as soon as the nurse permitted he rushed in to be reassured by his big father. Phil was preoccupied with shaving and did not know about the bad dream. Junior tried to climb up Phil's legs.

"That will do," said his father in imminent peril of cutting his chin; "get down. Get down, I tell you. Oh, Nell!"—she was in the next room—"make your child quit picking on me."

"Come to me, dearest. Mustn't bother Father when he's shaving."

Junior wasn't piqued but he was puzzled.

"But I thought he loved me; he told me he loved me," he called out. "Didn't you tell me you loved me, Father?"

Phil laughed to cover his embarrassment. He had not reckoned on Junior's giving him away to Nell, and knew that she was triumphing over him now in silence.

"Your father never loves anybody before breakfast," said Junior's mother, smiling as she covered him with kisses.

Apparently fathers could never be like mothers.

Nell knew it was a risk, but she wanted to be with Phil as much as he wanted to be with her—the old life together they both loved. So they decided that Junior was big enough now to stand the trip to Mongolia. It was a great mistake. Before they had crossed Russia all of them regretted it—except Junior. He was having a grand time. At present he was working his way back from the door of the railway compartment to the window again, and for the third time was stepping upon his father's feet. Phil had had a bad time with the custom officials, a bad time with the milk boxes and a bad night's sleep. His temper broke under the strain.

"Oh, children are a damn nuisance," he growled.

"Come, dear, look at these funny houses out of the window," said Junior's mother. "Aren't they funny houses?"

That night when she was putting him to sleep with the

recital of those who loved him, Junior inquired, "Mamma, what is a damn nuisance?"

"A damn nuisance," said his mother, "is a perfect darling."

All the same he had learned that he must avoid stepping on his father's freshly polished boots. One more item added to the list. Mustn't touch him with sticky hands, mustn't play with his pipes, mustn't make a noise when he takes his nap on the train—so many things to remember, such a small head to keep them all in.

There was no more milk. There was very little proper food of any kind for Junior in the camp, although Phil sent a small-sized expedition away over the divide for the purpose. The boy became ill. Phil ordered a special train to bring a famous physician. He even neglected this work on the boy's account, something unprecedented for Phil. But this was no place for children. The boy would have to go home. That meant that his mother would too. . . . All the beautiful dream of being together spoiled.

"I'm going back to America because I am a damn nuisance to my father," Junior announced to Phil's assistant.

Phil neglected his work again and went with them as far as the border. "But you do love him," said Nell; "you know you do. You'd give up your life for him."

"Naturally. All I object to is giving up my wife for him."

But Phil's last look was at the poor little sickly boy. He wondered if he would ever see him again. He did. But he never saw his wife again.

It was too late to do anything about it. His assistant, who had seen these married lovers together, marvelled at the way his silent chief went about the day's work until his responsibility to the syndicate was discharged. Then he marvelled more when just as the opportunity of a professional lifetime came to Phil he threw up his job and started for home.

He meant to stay there. He would get into the office end of the work and devote the rest of his life to Nell's boy. That was his job now. Previously he had left it to her—too much so. The brave girl! Never a whine in all the blessed years of their marriage. The child until now had seemed merely to belong to him, a luxury he did not particularly want. Now he belonged to the child, a necessity, and being

needed made Phil want him. But the Great War postponed this plan.

So Junior continued to live with his devoted Aunt Mary. She cherished his belief in Phil's perfection, but she could not understand why her busy brother never wrote to his adoring little son. But for that matter, Phil never wrote to his adoring little sister. He never wrote letters at all, except on business. He sent telegrams and cables—long, expensive ones.

On the memorable day when father and son were reunited at last an unwelcome shyness came upon them and fastened itself there like a bad habit. Neither knew how to break it. Each looked at the other wistfully with eyes that were veiled.

Junior was more proud of his wonderful father now than ever. Phil had a scar on his chin. The boy was keen to hear all about it. His father did not seem inclined to talk of that, and Junior had a precocious fear of boring him. He had made up his mind never to be a damn nuisance to his father again. He had long since discovered the meaning of those words.

Phil soon became restless and discontented with office work. He had done the other thing too long and too well to enjoy civilization for more than a month or so at a time, and the financial crowd infuriated him. He was interested in mining problems. They were interested in mining profits.

Owing to changes wrought by the war another great opportunity had arisen in a part of the world Phil knew better than any other member of his profession. "It's a man's job," they told him, "and you're the only one who could swing it."

Phil shook his head. "Not fair to the boy."

"But with the contract we're prepared to offer you, why, your boy will be on Easy Street all his life."

That got him. "Just once more," thought Phil. "I'll clean up on this and then retire to the country—make a real home for him—dogs and horses. I'll teach him to shoot and fish. That ought to bring us together."

So Junior's father was arranging to go away again. He told the boy about the plan for the future. "And we'll spend a lot of time in the woods together," said Phil. "I'll make a good camper of you. Your mother was a good

camper." This comforted the silent little fellow and he did not let the tears come until after Phil's back was turned.

Meanwhile Phil had been going into the school question with the same thoroughness he devoted to every other job he undertook.

And now the epochal time had come for Junior to go away to boarding school. He was rather young for it, but Aunt Mary, it seems, was going to be married at last.

She volunteered to accompany the boy on the journey and see him through the first day. His father was very busy, of course, with preparations for his much longer and more important journey. Junior had always been fond of Aunt Mary, had transferred to her a little of the passionate devotion that had belonged to his mother. Only a little. The rest was all for his father, though Phil did not know it, and sometimes watched these two together with hungry eyes, wondering how they laughed and loved so comfortably.

On the evening before the great day his father said, "I know several of the masters up there." A little later, he added, "One of the housemasters was a classmate of mine at college." Then he said, "I've been thinking it over. Maybe I better go up there with you myself."

"Oh, if you only would!" thought the little fellow. But he considered himself a big fellow now and had learned to repress such impulses, just as he and the dogs had learned not to jump up and kiss Phil's face. So all Junior said was, "That's awfully kind of you, but can you spare the time?" He always became self-conscious in his father's presence.

"You'd rather have your Aunt Mary? Well, of course, that's all right."

"No, but"—Junior dropped his eyes and raised them again—"sure I won't be a nuisance to you?"

Phil had forgotten the association of that word. All he saw was that the boy wanted him more than he did Mary and it pleased him tremendously. "Then that's all fixed," he said.

The housemaster was of the hearty pseudo-slangy sort. He said to Junior's father, "Skinny little cuss, isn't he? Well, we'll soon build him up."

"Aleck, I want you to take good care of this fellow," said Phil. "He's all I've got, you know."

"Oh, I'll keep a strict eye on him, and if he gets fresh I'll bat him over the head."

Junior knew that he was supposed to smile at this and did so. He did not feel much like smiling. He discovered that he was to be in the housemaster's house. He did not believe that he would ever like this Mr. Fielding, but he did in time.

As it came nearer and nearer his father's train time the terrible sinking feeling became worse, and he was afraid that he might cry after all; and that would disgrace his father. They walked down to the station together. They walked slowly. They would not see each other again for a year—maybe two. Both were thinking about it, neither referring to it. "I suppose that's the golf links over there?" said Junior.

"I suppose so," said Phil. He hadn't looked.

There were a number of fathers and a greater number of mothers saying good-bye. Some of the mothers were crying, all of them were kissing their boys. Even some of the fathers did that. Junior and Phil saw it. They glanced at each other and away again, both wondering whether it would be done by them; each hoping so, yet fearing it wouldn't be. Phil remembered how when he was a youngster he hated to be kissed before the other boys. He did not want to mortify the manly little fellow; and the boy knew better than to begin such things. ("Don't bore your father.")

"Well," said Phil, looking at his watch, "I suppose I might as well get on the train." Then he laughed as though that were funny. "Good-bye," he said. "Work hard and you'll have a good time here. Good-bye, Junior." The father held out his hand.

The son shook it. "Good-bye, Father, I'll bet you have a great trip in the mountains." And Junior laughed too. The train pulled out, and the forlorn little boy was alone now. Worse. Surrounded by strangers.

"Well, I didn't mortify him, anyway," said the father.

"Well, I didn't cry before him, anyway," said the son. But he was doing it now.

The veil between them was not yet lifted.

Junior had a roommate named Black. So he was called Blackie. Blackie had a nice mother who used to come to see him frequently. Junior took considerable interest in moth-

ers, observed them closely when even the most observant of them were quite unaware of it. He approved of his roommate's mother, despite her telling Blackie not to forget his rubbers, dear. Blackie glanced at Junior to see if he was listening. Junior pretended that he wasn't.

"Aren't mothers queer?" said Blackie after she had gone.

"Sure," said Junior.

"Always worrying about you. You know how it is."

"Sure."

"I bet your mother's the same way."

Junior hesitated. "My mother's dead," he said. "Bet I can beat you to the gate." They raced and Junior beat him.

But he soon perceived that he would never make an athlete, and so he was a nonentity all through the early part of his school career, one of the little fellows in the lower form, thin legs and squeaky voice.

The things on the walls of Junior's room—spears, arrows, shields, and an antelope head—first drew attention to Junior's only distinction. That was why he had put them there.

"Oh, that's nothing," he said with some arrogance, after the expected admiration and curiosity had been elicited. "You just ought to see my father's collection." And this gave Junior his chance to tell about the collector. "These things—only some junk he didn't want and sent to me."

This was not strictly true. His father had not sent them. Junior had begged them from his aunt, and she was glad to get them out of her new house. They did not go in any of her rooms. It was soon spread about the school, as Junior knew it would be, that this skinny little fellow in the lower form had a father who was worth while, a dare-devil who led expeditions to distant and dangerous lands and seldom lived at home. He had killed his man, it seems, had nearly lost his life from an attack by a hostile tribe in Africa. He became a romantic, somewhat mythical figure.

"When my old man was in college," said Smithy, also a lower-form boy and envious of Junior's vicarious fame, "he made the football team."

"My father was the captain of his eleven," said Junior.

"My father was in the war," said Smithy.

"Mine was wounded."

But he soon observed that one could not boast too openly about one's father. Smithy made that mistake about the family possessions—yachts and the like. He was squelched by an upper-form boy. Junior became subtle. He caused questions to be asked and answered them reluctantly, it seemed.

Many of the boys had photographs of fathers in khaki. Junior went them one better. After the Christmas holidays the crowded mantelpiece included an old faded kodak of Phil in a tropical explorer's costume—white helmet, rifle, binoculars, cartridge belt. It had been taken as a joke by one of his engineer associates in Africa but it was taken seriously by Junior and his associates in school.

"Where is the scar from the African spear thrust?" asked Smithy.

"It doesn't show in the picture," said Junior, "but he often lets me see it. He and I always go fishing together in the North Woods when he's in this country. Long canoe trips. I enjoy camping with him because he's had a pretty good deal of experience at that sort of thing."

Junior established a very interesting personality for Phil.

"Gee! I wish my father was like that," said one of the boys. "My old man always gives me hell."

One day during the second year Blackie said, "June, why doesn't your father ever come here to see you?"

"Oh, he's so seldom in this country, and he's terribly busy when he gets here. Barely has time to jump from one large undertaking to another." He had heard Aunt Mary's husband say "large undertaking."

"Well, some of the fellows think you're just bluffing about your father."

"Huh! They're jealous. Look at Smithy's father. Nothing but money and fat. Huh!"

Then came the great day when a wireless arrived for Junior. Very few boys get messages from their fathers by wireless. "Land Friday," it said. "Coming to see you Saturday." Ah! That would show them!

Junior jumped into a sort of first-page prominence in the news of the day. He let some of his friends see the wireless. And now all of them would see his father on Saturday. That was the day of the game. Junior would have a chance to

exhibit him before the whole school. "Six feet two and well proportioned." "Captain of his team in college." He planned it all out carefully. They would arrive late at the game and Junior would lead him down the line. But he would do it with a matter-of-fact manner as if used to going to games with his father.

On Friday he received a telegram. "Sorry can't make it stop am wiring headmaster permission spend week-end with me stop meet at office lunch time stop go to ball game and theatre in the evening." It was a straight telegram at that, not a night letter. That would show the boys what kind of a father he had.

"Hot dog!" they said. "But look here! You'll miss the game."

"The game" meant the great school game, of course, not the mere world-series event Junior was going to.

"Well, you see, he doesn't have many chances to be with me. I'll have to go." A dutiful son.

But on Saturday morning he received another telegram. "Sorry must postpone our spree together letter follows."

He was beginning to wonder if his father really wanted to see him. It was a great jolt to his pride. He had counted upon letting the boys know where they lunched, what play they saw together, and perhaps there might be a few hair-breadth escapes to relate.

"He can't come," said Junior to his roommate, tearing up the telegram.

"Why can't he?" asked Blackie. Did Blackie suspect anything? His parents never let anything prevent their seeing Blackie.

"Invited to the White House," said Junior, tossing the torn telegram into the fire. "The President wants to consult him about conditions in Siberia."

"Gee!" This made a sensation and it would spread. "But aren't you going to see him at all?"

"Of course. Going down next week probably, but you know an invitation to the White House is a command."

"That's so." Junior's father's stock was soaring.

That evening Smithy dropped in. He had heard about the White House and the President.

"Huh! I don't believe you've got a father," said Smithy.

Junior only smiled and glanced at his roommate. Later Blackie told the others that Smithy was jealous. "His father has nothing but money and fat." Junior was always too much for Smithy. But suppose the promised letter did not follow. It hardly seemed possible. He had received occasional cables, several telegrams, and that one notable wireless, but never in all his life a letter from his father.

It came promptly. It was brief and it was dictated, but it was a letter all the same, and he was much impressed. He had a letter from his father, like other fellows. It explained that the writer had been called away to New Mexico by important business, but that he hoped to join his son during the summer. "It's time we got acquainted. With much love, Your Father."

"Well, we're going to meet during the summer anyway," thought Junior, folding up the letter. And his father had sent his love. To be sure, he sent it through his secretary. But he sent it all the same.

That evening Junior arranged to be found casually reading a letter when the gang dropped in.

"What have you got?" asked Smithy.

"Oh, just a letter from my father," remarked Junior casually. "Wants to know if I won't go out to the Canadian Rockies with him next summer." He seemed to keep on on reading. It was a bulky letter apparently. Junior had attached three blank sheets of paper at the same size as that on which the note was written.

"Gee! Your old man writes you long ones," said Smithy. "What's it all about?"

"Oh, he merely wanted to tell me about his conference with the President."

"Hot dog! Read it aloud."

"Sorry, Smithy, but it's confidential!" Folded in such a way that its brevity was concealed, Junior carelessly exposed the first sheet bearing his father's engraved letterhead. "Confidential" had been written by pen across the top. Junior had written it.

All this produced the calculated effect for his father, but it was cold comfort for the son.

Well, he did see his father at last, but it was during the summer vacation, and the boys would know nothing about it

until the fall term opened. Junior was staying with Aunt Mary in the country, and came in for the day. Phil was dictating letters and jumped up with a loud "Hello, there, hello!" And this time he kissed his son, right in front of his secretary. She was the only one of the three not startled. Phil and Junior both blushed.

"Mrs. Allison, this is Junior," said Phil. He seemed to be really glad to see the boy, and Junior's heart was thumping. Mrs. Allison said, "Pleased to meet you," but Junior liked her all the same. She looked kind. And while her employer finished his dictation she glanced at Junior and smiled. The letter progressed slowly and had to be changed twice. Mrs. Allison knew why, and smiled again, at her pencil this time. She understood them both better than they understood each other.

"Thank you, Mrs. Allison," Phil said; "that will be all to-day. I'm too tired." She knew he never tired. "I'll sign them after lunch and mail them myself." Then he turned to Junior. "Now you and I are going out to have a grand old time together, eh, what, old top?"

He slapped Junior on the back. Then Mrs. Allison left the room, and father and son were alone together. It frightened them.

Already the old clamping habit of reserve was trying to have its way with them, though each was determined to prevent it. Both of them laughed and said, "Well, well!" hoping to bluff it off.

"First, let's have a look at you," said Phil; and he playfully dragged Junior toward the window. The boy's laughter suddenly died, and Phil now had a disquieting sense of making an ass of himself in his son's eyes. But that was not it. Junior dreaded the strong light of the window. With his changing voice had arrived a few not very conspicuous pimples; such little ones, but they distressed him enormously.

"Well, feel as if you could eat something?"

"Yes, thank you," said Junior. He feared it sounded cold and formal. He couldn't help it.

They went to a club on the top of a high office building. Junior's name was written in the guest book, which awed him agreeably. A large, luxurious luncheon was outlined by Phil, beginning with a cantaloupe and ending with ice

cream—a double portion for Junior. This was first submitted to Junior for approval. He had forgotten his facial blemishes.

“Golly! You bet I approve,” said Junior laughing. That was more like it.

Phil summoned a waiter and then sent for the head waiter. A great man, his father, not afraid even of head waiters. And he ordered with the air of one who knew. No wonder the waiters seemed honoured to serve him. Only, how was one to “get this over” to the boys without seeming to boast?

“A little fish, sir, after the melon?”

“Yes, if you’ll bring some not on the menu.” That was puzzling. Phil explained. Fish which had arrived at the club after the menu had been printed was sure to be fresh.

“Oh, I see,” said Junior. This would make a hit with the boys.

There was no doubt about it, his handsome father was the most distinguished personage in the whole large roomful of important-looking people. Several of them gathered around to welcome Phil. Junior was presented. Their greetings to the son showed their warm affection, their high regard for the father. Junior wallowed in filial pride. If only Smithy could see him now! What a father! A citizen of the world who did big things and wore perfect-fitting clothes, cut by his Bond Street tailor in London—the finishing touch of greatness to a boy of Junior’s age—and he recalled what one of the engineers had said to Aunt Mary, “Even in camp he shaves every day.”

“Well, tell me how everything is going at school,” said the father, who did not dream that he was being hero-worshipped.

But Junior could not be easy and natural, as with Aunt Mary. He blushed as in the presence of a stranger. He heard his own raucous voice and hated it. He took unnecessary sips of water.

He felt better and bolder after the delicious food arrived. Phil looked on with amusement, amazement at the amount the youngster consumed.

“Next year I hope you can find time to come down to see us at school,” Junior ventured with his double portion of ice cream. “All the fellows want to meet you.”

"I want to meet them," said his father. "This fall on the way back, maybe."

"Oh, you're going away again?"

"Next week I'm going up into the woods with Billy Norton on a long canoe trip. Some new country I want to show him. Trout streams never yet fished by a white man."

"Gosh! That'll be great," said Junior.

"Some day I'll take you up there. It's time you learned that game. Fly casting, like swinging a gold club, should begin before your muscles are set. Would you care to go on a camping trip with me?"

Care to! Of course it was the very thing he was doing all the time in his daydreams, but he could not say that to his father. He said, "Yes, thanks," and paused for another sip of water. "You wouldn't—no, of course, you wouldn't want me to go along this time."

"Not this time. You see, I promised Billy. Some day though—you and I alone. Much better, don't you think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't call me sir! Makes me feel like a master. I'm your father." They laughed at that and went back to the office. "Only take me a second to sign these letters," said Phil. Junior looked at the neat pile of them, again impressed by his father's importance.

"That's awfully nice paper," he said, coveting the engraved letterhead with his father's name on it, which was also his name.

"If you like it, take some," said Phil as he rapidly signed that name. "Help yourself, all you want. Wait, I'll get you a whole box." He touched a bell and a boy came in. "Get a box of my stationery and ship it to this address." He turned to his letters again. "Then you won't have to pack it all the afternoon." Pack it? Oh, yes, out-of-doors men said "pack" instead of "carry." He would say it hereafter.

On the way from the elevator, as they passed through the arcade, Junior stopped to gaze with admiration at a camera in a shop window.

"Like one of those?" asked Phil. He led the way in. "Take your pick," he said. And then, "Ship it to this address."

It was the only way this shy father knew how to express his affection. It was not easy to say much to this boy. He seemed keen and critical under his quiet manner.

Before the baseball game was over—a dull, unimportant game—they were both talked out, each wondering what was the matter. “I suppose I bore him,” said Phil to himself, and soon began thinking about his business. When their grand old time together was finished each felt a horrible sense of relief, though neither would acknowledge it to himself.

“Poor little cuss!” thought Phil. “I’d like to be a good father to him, but I don’t know how.”

And the boy: “I’m afraid he’s disappointed in me. I’m so skinny and have pimples.” If he were only a big, good-looking fellow like Smithy, who played on the football team, his father would be proud of him. Smithy’s parents saw him almost every week in term time and took him abroad every summer. They were having his portrait painted.

“What kind of time did you have with your father in town?” asked his Aunt Mary. Junior felt rather in the way at times, now that she had a husband.

“Bully! Great!” and he made an attractive picture of it. “Father and I are so congenial, now that I’m old. Next summer we’re going to the woods together.

“How do you talk to your kids?” Phil asked Bill Norton by the camp fire.

“I don’t talk to them. They aren’t interested in me except as a source of supply. New generation!”

“I’m crazy about my boy,” said Phil, “but I have an idea that he considers the old man a well-meaning ass. Funny thing; that little fellow is the only person in the world I’m afraid of.”

“No father really knows his own son,” said Billy. “Some of them think they do, but they don’t. It’s a psychological impossibility.”

Back at school again. A quick, scudding year. Summer vacation approaching already!

“We’d be so pleased if you would spend the month of August with us in Maine,” wrote Blackie’s mother. She had grown fond of the boy and was sorry for him. Motherless—fatherless, too, for practical, for parental purposes.

Junior, with his preternatural quickness, knew she was sorry for him and appreciated her kindness, but he was not to be pitied and his father was not to be criticized. "That's awfully good of you," he replied, "but Father is counting upon my going up to the North Woods with him on a long canoe trip. Some new country where no other white man has ever been."

He went to the woods, but not with his father. It was the school camp—not the wild country his father penetrated; but there was trout fishing all the same, and he loved it. Like many boys who are not proficient at athletics, he took to camp life like a savage and developed more expertness at casting and cooking and canoeing than did certain stars of the football field or track. He had natural savvy. The guides said so. Besides, he had an incentive to excel. He was not going to be a nuisance to his father on the trip they would take together some day. And though he reverted to a state of savagery in the woods, he kept his tent and his outfit scrupulously neat and won first prize in this department by a vote of the counsellors. For excellent reasons he did not shave every day in camp, but he would some day.

He learned a great deal about the ways of birds while he was in the woods, and back at school he persuaded Blackie to help organize The Naturalists Club, despite the jeers of the athlete idolaters. He took many bird pictures with the camera and he prepared a bird census of the township. This was published in the school magazine, and so Junior decided that when he got through college he would be a writer.

He had not seen his father for two years. South America this time—in the Andes. The canoe trip was no longer mentioned. Junior went to the school camp regularly now. He was acknowledged the best all-round camper in school. He won first prize in fly casting and the second in canoeing. He was getting big and strong, and became a good swimmer.

He spent his Christmas vacation with Aunt Mary, and while there Mrs. Fielding, the wife of the housemaster, in town for the holidays, dropped in for tea one day with Aunt Mary. They did not know that Junior was in the adjoining room, reading Stewart Edward White.

"But it's criminal the way Phil neglects that darling boy," said Aunt Mary.

"And he's developing in such a fine way too," said Mrs. Fielding. "He's one of the best liked boys in school."

"I can't understand my brother. Of course he's terribly engrossed with his career, now that he has won success, but he might at least send a picture post card occasionally."

"You mean to say he never writes to his own son!" Mrs. Fielding was shocked and indignant. And then came this tragic revelation to Junior:

"Well, you see," said Aunt Mary, "Phil never wanted children, and he's not really interested in the boy."

"You don't tell me so! Why, Aleck always speaks of your brother as if he were so generous and warm-hearted."

"Yes, that's what makes it so pathetic. He is kind and tries to make up for his lack of affection by giving Junior a larger allowance than is good for him. But he never takes the trouble to send him a Christmas present."

So that explained it all. "He's not interested in me. I wasn't wanted." And after that he had his first experience with a sleepless night.

A few days later Junior remarked, "By the way, Aunt Mary, did I show you the binoculars Father sent me for Christmas?" He handed them to her for inspection. They looked secondhand. They were. He had picked them up that morning in a pawnshop. "These are the very ones that Father carried all through the war. He knew I'd like them better than new ones. Just like Father to think of that. You remember his showing them to us when he got back?"

Aunt Mary did not remember such things—he knew she wouldn't—but she rejoiced to hear it.

"He has sent me a typewriter too; only he ordered it shipped directly to the school."

"That was nice of him, wasn't it?" said Aunt Mary.

"That's the way he does with most of the presents he sends me. You remember the camera?"

She did remember the camera.

The typewriter had been ordered on the installment plan. Junior hadn't saved enough money from his allowance to buy it outright.

"He's not going to get me a radio set until he finds out which is the best make on the market, he says."

"Oh, has he written to you?" Aunt Mary was still more surprised.

"Every week," said Junior.

"Oh, Junior! I'm so glad. But why haven't you ever told me, dear?"

Junior smiled. "I didn't want to make you jealous. He never writes to you."

"But didn't you know how I would want to hear all his news?"

"You are so terribly engrossed in Uncle Robert's career, I thought maybe you weren't interested in Father."

At school the binoculars made a hit with the boys because they showed the scars of war, but no one thought much of typewriters as Christmas presents except Junior. He knew what he was doing.

A few days later, when Blackie entered the room he found his roommate engrossed in reading a letter and so said nothing until Junior emitted an absent-minded chuckle.

"What's the joke?"

"Oh, nothing; just a letter from my father."

"From your father? I thought he never wrote to you."

"What do you know about it?"

"Well, I never see any envelopes with foreign stamps."

"He always incloses mine in letters to my aunt."

"But you never mentioned them, all the same," said Blackie, "except the one about the White House."

"They are confidential, mostly." Junior returned to the absorbing letter. Presently he laughed outright.

"What does he say that's so funny?"

"Oh, hell! Read it yourself." Junior seemed irritated and tossed the bulky letter across to his roommate.

It had taken the boy some time to compose this letter to himself, for it required more than the possession of a typewriter and his father's engraved stationery to create a convincing illusion of a letter from a father. Junior had seen so few, except for those Blackie had allowed him to read, that he had no working model for long, interesting letters worthy of a great man like his father.

The first draught had begun, "My darling boy," but he changed that—it sounded too much like Blackie's mother. He made it "My dearest son." He rather fancied that, but

finally played safe and addressed himself simply as "Dear Junior."

My work here is going fine. I have three thousand natives at work under me not to speak of a hundred engineers on my staff doing the technical work. I am terribly busy but of course won't let that interfere with my regular weekly letter to you.

Junior was watching Blackie's face.

I often think of the last canoe trip with you in Canada and can hardly wait until I take another canoe trip with you in Canada. Remember that time you hooked a four-pounder with your three ounce rod? You were a little fellow then, that was before you went away to school. Remember how you yelled to me for help to land same?

Business men always said "same," but Junior didn't like it, and besides, his father was a professional man, so he changed "same," to "him."

Of course it wasn't much of a trick for me to land that four pound trout on a three ounce rod, because I am probly the best fisherman in any of the dozen or more fishing clubs I belong to.

Junior revised that to read:

Because I happen to have quite a little experience landing trout and salmon in some of the most important streams in the world, from the high Sierras to the Ural Mountains.

It would never do to make his father guilty of blowing—the unforgivable sin.

He thought that was all right for a beginning, but did not know how to follow it up. He wanted to put in something about the Andes, with a few stories of wild adventure and hairbreadth escapes, but although he read up on the Andes in the encyclopædia, as he did on all his father's temporary *habitats*, he did not feel that the encyclopædia style suited his father's vivid personality. In an old copy of the *National Geographic Magazine* he found a traveller's description of adventures in that part of the world, and simply copied a page or two. It had to do with an amusing though extremely dangerous adventure with a python, which had treed one of the writer's gun bearers—a narrow escape told

as a joke—quite his father's sort of thing; and no one would ever accuse Junior of inventing such a well-written narrative with such circumstantial local colour.

Blackie was properly impressed by the three thousand natives and one hundred experts, and he too, laughed aloud at the antics of the gun bearer. He told the other boys about it, as Junior meant him to do, and some of them wanted to read it too. They dropped in after study hour.

Junior, it seems, required urging, like an amateur vocalist who nevertheless has brought her music.

"Oh, shoot!" he said. "It doesn't amount to anything. Just a letter from my father."

"Why don't you read it aloud?" suggested Blackie.

Junior seemed bored, but soon submitted. Like vocalists, he was afraid that they might stop urging him.

"Oh, very well," he said. He skimmed lightly over the opening personal paragraph with the parenthetical voice people use when leading up to the important part of a letter, though this was a very important part for Junior, to get it over. Then, with the manner of saying, "Ah, here we are," he began reading in a louder and more deliberate tone, but not without realistic hesitation here and there, as if unfamiliar with the text. He read not only the amusing adventure with the python, but an authoritative paragraph on the mineral deposits of the mountains. So his audience never doubted that he had a real letter from a real mining expert who signed himself "Your affectionate friend and father."

Junior carelessly tossed the letter upon the table. "Some day I'll read you one of his interesting ones," he said.

"Do it now," said one of his admirers. "It's great stuff."

"No, I never keep letters," said Junior and, to prove it, tore up the carefully prepared document and tossed it in the fire.

"I'll let you know when I get a good one."

This was so successful that he did it again. There were plenty of other quotable pages in the same magazine article, and Junior had a whole box of his father's stationery. But at the beginning and end of each letter Junior always insinuated a few paternal touches, suggesting a rich past of intimacy and affection, though just to make it a little more convincing he would occasionally insert something like this,

"But I must tell you frankly, as man to man, that you spent entirely too much money last term," and interrupted his reading to say, "Gee! I didn't mean to read you fellows that part." And they all laughed. A touch of parental nature that made all the boys akin.

The fame of these letters spread from the boys' end of the dinner table to the master's. Mr. Fielding said to Junior one day, "I'm so glad your father has been writing to you lately."

"Lately? Why, he always writes to me. But don't tell my Aunt Mary. Might make her jealous."

Junior smiled as if he had a great joke on his Aunt Mary. There, he got that over too! Neither of these ladies would dare criticize his father again.

"Is your Aunt Mary so fond of him as all that?"

"Why, of course!"

"Well, I'm glad you're hearing from him, anyway. I so seldom see letters addressed to you on the hall table.

"I have a lock box at the post office."

"Oh," said Mrs. Fielding.

So that explained it all. It was true about the lock box. Junior exhibited the key while was he speaking, and he was seen at the post office frequently to make the matter more plausible. He even opened the box if any one was around to watch him, though he never found any letters there except those he put in and pulled out again by sleight of hand, whistling carelessly as he did so.

Mr. Fielding had asked Junior to step into the office a moment. "What do you hear from your father?" he said.

"Oh, he's quite well, thank you, sir. He'll be starting for home soon. He says he's not going to let anything interfere with our canoe trip this year. It's the funniest thing how something has always happened every summer to prevent it. Father says we're going to break the hoodoo this time."

"I see," said Mr. Fielding.

Junior had heard Mr. Fielding say "I see" before and he had been in school too long now to undervalue its significance. He would have to be on guard. He knew he had told conflicting stories.

"Do you hear from him regularly?"

"Oh, no; the mails are so irregular from that part of the world."

"How often?"

"Well," said Junior, with his engaging smile, "not so often as I'd like, of course. But then he's a very busy man."

"That story about the python—it sounded like a corker as Blackie told it secondhand. Mind letting me read that letter?"

"Sorry, sir. I destroyed it." Blackie would vouch for that, if necessary.

"I see." The head master looked at Junior in silence, then he said with a not unkind smile. "Junior, I'm very fond of your father. He's one of the finest fellows that ever lived."

"Sure," said Junior.

"I've known him longer than you have. I don't think he ever did anything dishonourable in his life."

"Of course not."

What was coming? He must keep his head now.

"You know how your father would feel if I couldn't honestly say the same thing about you?"

"Why, what do you mean, Mr. Fielding?"

"Just tell me the truth, Junior, and it needn't ever go out of this room. Does your father ever write to you at all?"

"Why, sir, you don't think my father is the sort who wouldn't write to his own son, do you?" Then the boy added desperately, "I don't see why you all want to make him out a piker."

"Did your father write the letter describing the fight with the python?"

"Look here, Mr. Fielding, you people don't understand. I'm better friends with my father than most boys. You see, my mother's dead and all that. So—well, don't you see, he sort of takes it out in writing me long letters. He thought that stuff about the python would amuse me."

He was a loyal little liar and the head master admired him for it. But it wouldn't do. Mr. Fielding opened a drawer of his desk and took out an old magazine.

"Does your father take the *National Geographic*?"

Junior crumpled up.

"I don't know, sir." He was in for it now—caught. Mr. Fielding opened the magazine and pointed out a marked page to Junior.

"Junior, I know you won't accuse an honourable gentleman like your father of stealing another man's writings, passing them off as his own. There's an ugly name for that. It's called plagiarism."

He had tried to defend his father, and look at the result!

"I wrote those letters, Mr. Fielding."

"I knew that," said Mr. Fielding gently. "You won't do it again, though, will you, Junior?"

"Hardly."

"That's all. You may go now."

Junior turned at the door. He knew that this was not all. He was being let down too easily.

"Mr. Fielding——" he began, and hesitated. "It won't be necessary for you to tell my father, will it?"

"I won't tell him, but you will."

"No, sir, I could never do that."

"Well, we'll see. Good night, Junior."

So he could write no more letters to exhibit to the boys. He explained that his father had gone on a long expedition inland. No chance for mail for months. They made no comment, but the whole house knew that he had been summoned "to the office." They suspected something, but they would never discover the truth from him. He would bluff it out to the end.

But now, more than ever, he wanted letters from father, even if written by himself. He had formed the habit. They somehow did him good. They made him feel that his father was interested in him.

So, once in a while, just for his own eyes, when Blackie was not around he opened the typewriter and said all the things he wanted his father to say to him. As no one would ever see these letters, he could go as far as he liked. He went quite far. He even said things that only mothers said:

My darling son: Don't you care what he thinks about you; I understand and I forgive you. You meant it all right and I like you just the same, even if you are not an athlete and have got pimples. When I get back we'll go off to the West together and live down this disgrace. Your devoted father and friend.

Sometimes he laughed a little, or tried to, when he realized how these letters would bore his distinguished parent. But while writing them his father seemed not only fond of him but actually proud of him. A writer can invent anything.

I was so pleased to hear your poem about the meadow lark was accepted by the magazine. Your article about Birds in Our Woods was very interesting and very well written. I believe you will make a great writer some day, and think how proud I will be when you are a great writer, and people point to your picture in the newspapers! I'll say, "That's my son; I'm his father." Of course, I was disappointed that you did not become a great athlete like me, but intellectual distinction is good if you can't get athletic distinction, and it may be more useful for a career.

He got a good deal of comfort out of being a father to himself, and sometimes the letters ran into considerable length, unless Blackie butted in. His father, it seemed, even consulted him about his own affairs:

I am glad you approve of my taking on the San Miguel project. I think a great deal of your business judgment and it is great to have a son who has good business judgment even though he cannot make the team. In that respect it is better than making the team, because you can help me in my problems away off here just as I help you with your problems up there at school.

He enjoyed writing that one, but when he became the reader of it, that last sentence made him cry. And the worst of it was, at that point Blackie came in.

"What are you writing?"

"Just some stuff for the mag."

"You're always writing for the mag. Get your racket and come on."

"Oh, get out of here and quit interrupting my literary work." Junior had not cared to turn his telltale face toward his roommate.

The school year was closing, and Junior was packing to leave the next day. The last time he had gone to town he learned at the office that his father was returning soon. They did not know which steamer. They never did. The secret letters had all been kept carefully locked in his trunk, and now Junior was taking them out to put neatly folded trousers in the bottom. Blackie was playing tennis. None of the

boys had learned the truth, though in secret Blackie felt pretty sure of it now, but was so loyal that he had a fight with Smithy for daring to say in public that Junior's letters were a damn fake.

Mr. Fielding came in. He did not notice the letters lying there on the table, and he seemed very friendly. The house-master knew how fine and sensitive this boy was and that the only way to handle him was by encouragement. "We are all much pleased with your classroom work, Junior; but as for the mag, you're a rotten speller, but a good writer, and I don't mind telling you a secret: You have been elected to be one of the editors next year."

"Oh, Mr. Fielding! Are you sure?" This had been his ambition for a year. That settled it for life. A great writer like W. H. Hudson, who loved both nature and art, but nature more.

"Of course your appointment has to be confirmed by the faculty, but there'll be no trouble with a boy of your standing. All you have to do is straighten out that little matter with your father. Naturally, an editor has got to have a clean literary record."

This was not meant entirely as punishment for Junior. The master thought it would be salutary for Phil to know. It might wake him up.

"You mean I can't make the mag unless I tell him what I did?"

"Do you want me to tell him?"

"If you do I'll run away and I'll never come back."

"Can't you get up your courage to do it, Junior? I know you didn't mean to do wrong. Your father will, too, when he understands."

Junior was shaking his head.

"It isn't a matter of courage," he said, straightening up. "He'd think I was knocking him out for not writing to me."

"Well, if you won't talk to him about it I must. He'll be here in a few minutes."

"A few minutes! Here? Why didn't you tell me?"

"He landed yesterday. The papers ran an interview with him this morning. I telegraphed him to come at once." Mr. Fielding looked at his watch. "Why, his train must be

coming in now. Excuse me. I said I'd meet him at the station."

A mental earthquake turned Junior's universe upside down. His father was coming at last! Why? His offense must have been pretty serious to bring his father. Why, of course! Mr. Fielding had sent for him. The most honourable gentleman in the world was going to find out in a few minutes that his own son and namesake was a liar, a plagiarist, and a forger. Junior could not face it. He rushed from the room and out by the back stairs. His father was coming, the thing he planned and longed for ever since he had been a member of the school, and he was running away from him.

He went out into the woods by the river, where he had spent so many happy hours with Blackie and the birds. He could never face Blackie again, nor the school, no, nor his father. Life was empty and horrible. "Why not end it all in the river?" He had read that phrase, but the impulse was genuine.

"The hell of it is," he heard himself saying, "I'm such a good swimmer."

But he could load his coat with stones and bind his feet with his trousers. He began picking out the stones.

"Well, what's it?" said Phil to the housemaster, trying to hide his paternal eagerness. The boy was in trouble, the old man would get him out. Good! Needed at last. "Has my young hopeful been getting tight?"

"Oh, nothing as serious as that. He's a finely organized, highly evolved youngster, and so he has a rather vivid imagination."

"Speak up, Aleck! You haven't caught him in a lie? That's a good deal more serious than getting tight."

"Well, it's a likable lie."

"It's a lie all the same, and I'll give him the devil."

"Oh, no, you won't. The kid lied for you, old man; perjured himself like a gentleman. Now you go and get it out of him. It'll do you both good." They had arrived at the house.

"Where is the little cuss?" Phil was trying without success to seem calm and casual.

"He's no longer little. You won't know him. He's come into his heritage of good looks at last."

"For God's sake, shut up and tell me where to find him."

Fielding laughed. "Upstairs, second door on the left. I won't butt in on this business. It's up to you now." But Phil did not wait to hear all that.

Not finding his namesake and glancing about at the intimate possessions of his little-known son, Phil was surprised to see a sheath of letters on the table, bearing his own engraved stamp at the top.

"That's odd," he thought. "Who's been writing to him on my paper?" He had forgotten the presentation box of stationery. His eye was caught by these words neatly typed, "My beloved son," At the bottom of the page he saw, "Your faithful friend and father." He picked the letter up and read it.

As I told you in my last, I am counting the days until we get together again and go up to Canada on another canoe trip, just you and I alone this time without any guide. You have become such a good camper now that we don't want any greasy Indian guides around. I am glad that you are a good camper. I don't care what you say, I'd rather go to the woods with you than Billy Norton or anybody because you and I are not like ordinary father and sons; we are congenial friends. Of course you are pretty young to be a friend of mine and you may be an ugly and unattractive kid, but you are mine all the same, and I'm just crazy about you. They say I neglect you, but you know better. All these letters prove it. Your faithful friend and father.

Junior's father picked up the rest of the letters and, with the strangest sensations a father ever had, read them all.

Perhaps it was telepathy. Junior suddenly remembered that he had left the letters exposed upon the table. His father would go upstairs after the talk with Mr. Fielding, to disown him. He would find those incriminating letters. Then when they found his body his father would know that his son was not only a liar and a forger but a coward and a quitter. In all his life his father had never been afraid of anything. If his father were in his place what would he do?

That saved him. He dumped out the stones and ran back to the room. He would face it.

Phil was aware that a tall slender youth with a quick elastic stride had entered the room and had stopped abruptly

by the door, staring at him. There were reasons why he preferred not to raise his face at present, but this boy's figure was unrecognizably tall and strong, and Phil was in no mood to let a young stranger come in upon him now.

"What do you want?" he asked gruffly, still seated still holding the letters.

There was no answer. Junior had never seen a Father disown a son, but he guessed that was the way it was done. He saw the letters in his father's hands. Certainly, this was being disowned.

The boy took a step forward. "Well, anyway," he said, maintaining a defiant dignity in his disgrace, "no one else has seen those letters, so you won't be compromised, Father." The boy was a great reader, and had often heard of compromising letters.

Phil sprang up from his chair, dropped the letters and gazed into the fine sensitive face, a beautiful face, it seemed to him now, quivering, but held bravely up to meet his sentence like a soldier.

Junior could now see that his father's strong face was also quivering, but misunderstood the reason for his emotion. There was a silence while Phil gained control of his voice. Then he said, still gazing at the boy, "But how did you know I felt that way about you?"

"What way?"

"Those letters. I've read them. I wish to God I'd written them."

Junior, usually so quick, still could not get it right. "You mean, you're going to forgive me for lying about you?"

"Lying about me! Why, boy, you've told the truth about me. I didn't know how. Can you forgive me for that?"

Now Junior was getting it. His face was lighting up. "Why, Father," he began, and faltered. "Why, Father—why, Father—you really like me!"

Junior felt strong hands gripping his shoulders and once more the vivid recollection of the street boys and the big man who comforted him. "You know what one of those letters says, Junior—I'm just crazy about you."

"Oh, Father, why didn't you ever tell me?"

"Well, what's the use of having a great writer in the family anyway!"

They laughed and looked at each other and found that the strange thing that kept them apart was gone for ever. In the future they might differ, quarrel even, but the veil between them was torn asunder at last.

The rest of the boys had finished dinner when Junior came down, leading in his tall bronzed father with the perfectly fitting clothes and the romantic scar on his handsome face.

"Say, fellows, wait a minute. I want you to know my father." He did it quite as if accustomed to it, but Mrs. Fielding down at the end of the table could see that father and son were reeking with pride. "He's my son; I'm his father."

"So this is Blackie?" said Phil. "Did you give him that message in my last letter?" Even his father could lie when he wanted to.

"Sorry, I forgot."

Phil turned and gave his old classmate a shameless wink. "I can't really blame the kid. I write him such awfully long letters."

"Father just landed from South America yesterday," Junior was explaining to Smithy. "So he hurried right up here."

"You see we're starting for the Canadian Rockies tomorrow," said Phil. "This fellow's got an impudent idea that he can out-cast the old man now, but I'll show him his place."

Mr. Fielding took the floor. "Junior ought to get some good material for the magazine up there," he said. "Boys, he's going to be one of the editors next year."

VOLUME II
BOOK THREE

THE SPRING FLIGHT

By INEZ HAYNES IRWIN

From *McCall's*

THE first chilling shadows of the April dusk had settled over London when Shakspeare drew rein in front of the wigmaker's. The day had been untimely hot. His horse was in a lather and he too was dusty and tired; fretted. The city smells caught him; and in that mood he was prepared to dub Silver and Muggle the foulest corner in London. For a moment, nobody within seemed to take note of his arrival and then a sudden babble burst. "'Tis Will, husband! 'Tis Will Shakspeare!" he caught the characteristic tinkle of Mistress Montjoy's voice, turned shrill with delight. In an instant both the Montjoys were hurrying through the doorway on to the cobbles; Mistress Montjoy, an azure dart, swift and sure and smooth as a swan; the long side-ruffles of her white muslin overdress shearing the air, her iron-gray curls maintaining their perfect alignment. Montjoy himself, big-nosed, mottle-faced, dull-eyed, the puce of his suit the exact shade of his hard cheeks, not a hair of his glossy brown wig disturbed, moved more slowly from force of weight, bulk, or perhaps from his instinctive dislike of Shakspeare. Behind, the doorway filled for an instant with crop-headed 'prentice lads, gaping; then emptied precipitately as Montjoy threw his heavy glance back on them. But by this time, Mistress Montjoy had Shakspeare's hand; had smacked him heartily.

"Well, well, lad!" she exclaimed. "Welcome and plenty! We did not expect thee for a month yet. How camest thou to London so early?"

Shakspeare shook hands with his host. He laughed, but not mirthfully. "Upon my word, mistress, of that you know as much as I. A whim! An impulse! I work not well these days. I've worked not well for months. There's a

strange slowness to my mind. And then of a sudden, Stratford sounded dead and London smelled fresh. Is my chamber vacant, mistress? I can go a dozen places else."

"'Tis vacant and aching for thee, Will," Mistress Montjoy asserted. "But why stand we here for all London to jibe at? Come ye in, lad!"

Montjoy unstrapped the saddle bags, handed them to a boy whom he summoned by another heavy glance, and led the horse away. Shakspeare followed his hostess into the house. A half-dozen apprentices, sorting or stringing hair, were making, now that the master had disappeared, but a pretense of work. They gaped; cast slant glances. At one side, a trio of Montjoy's master assistants, their weaving-needles stuck in wigs fitted to featureless, head-shaped blocks on the long table, idled openly. A girl's face, set with two stark, blue O's of eye and one wondering soft red O of mouth, peered through a door.

"A jug of water, Nan!" Mistress Montjoy called shrilly after her. "And fresh face linen, Joan, for the guest chamber! Ink, a quill, and paper! Candles! Hurry, wenches! Fetch the saddle bags, Con!"

Close on her words came clatter and clash from the kitchen. Mistress Montjoy ran nimbly up the stairs and Shakspeare followed close on the heels which fluttered like stripes of red out of the azure petticoat. They entered a wide, low-ceiled room at the back of the house. Talking volubly, Mistress Montjoy threw open the casements of the two windows. Coolness, alternately staled by the stench from the city streets and freshened by odours from Mistress Montjoy's early-blooming garden, flowed into the unaired languor of the room. Came also the twilight sounds: the near shouts of children at play—boys at ball, little girls singing, "London Bridge Is Falling Down"; the far, faint cry of the apprentices on Cheapside, "What d'ye lack? What d'ye lack?" The flood of the silvery-umber twilight, stained scarlet from the sunset, oozed into the room, filmed the fine polish of the floor as with a visible wetness. A low, wide bed, a broad, use-blackened table, two stools, a carved chest, made black hulks in this rose-argent sea. Shakspeare stood in the centre of the room, a little dazed, staring about him. He was conscious alternately of a sense of fatigue . . . relief . . . re-

lease . . . fatigue . . . something like peace . . .
fatigue. . . .

"Thou'rt tired, lad," Mistress Montjoy commented, compassionately. "Yet how comest thou worn with that sun-blackened face? Thine eyes are lacklustre too."

It was true that though country tan had turned his olive colouring almost black, Shakspeare's eyes were hollow. The faint luminosity that lay in their hazel depths seemed to come, not from within, but from without—as though the force back of them had died down, leaving them to reflect mere light. Nevertheless, his moustached lips were firm and full; and they produced a smile whose quick glint gave to his face all the candid pleasantness which had distinguished its old-time mirth. The flash of smile lasted but an instant. The look which was normal to him—of a quiet, a reserve almost enigmatic, and touched now with weariness—blanketed it completely.

Mechanically Shakspeare sat down; extended his feet for the boy to pull off his boots. Mechanically he watched Mistress Montjoy rummage in his saddle bags until she found his shoes; as mechanically he watched the boy draw them on. "Tired!" he repeated. "Tired. Aye. My body's tired. I've ridden four days. But that's not the whole tale. My mind's tired. In truth, I'm staled by country life and country folk and country thought. The quiet . . . the damned, dead, dull quiet. . . . And maybe by age . . . I know not." He laughed out again, mirthlessly. "By Lady, thou'll not believe it, mistress, but I, Will Shakspeare, the industrious apprentice—'tis weeks since I have writ a line. Hours I've sat, my head in my hands, my brain stewing, festering. Then five days ago, on to my horse I leaped; turned his nose Londonward—and here am I. How I came, or by what roads, or what degrees, I know not. One night at Oxford at St. George's Inn comes clear; beside that naught but long days of dust and rain."

Mistress Montjoy's brisk glance played a gleam of blue obliqueness upon him. "And Mistress Davenant," she asked in even tones, "how goes it with her? And thy god-child?" She removed his cape; took his hat from his unresisting fingers.

"Well, well; both well," Shakspeare answered. His tone

was absent. And when the two maids entered—Nan, blue-eyed and flaxen-curled with the full hips of the country; Joan, dark and waxy, shapely too, though only a slim bit of cockney flesh—he considered their movements but absently. Nan placed candles on the table; took Shakspeare's cape and hat; disappeared. Joan put a pewter ewer and basin on the stand, wiped up a slop of water; disappeared. Nan returned with a slender sheaf of paper, a pewter inkstand, a quill; Joan with linen. All the time, Shakspeare was answering Mistress Montjoy's inquiries about his family.

Yes, Anne was well. And Sukey and Judy were well. Joan was well. And her three boys, Will and Tom and Michael, were well. Sukey's little Betty—for the first time Shakspeare's jaded face gleamed brilliantly as he talked of his only granddaughter—bloomed fairly. Yes, Betty was a great girl for her age, a gay, winsome, lovesome child, the pet of the family. Outwardly, Mistress Montjoy seemed to take no note of the perfunctory quality in Shakspeare's answers. But she finally interrupted the flow of her own interrogations with orders to the two maids for supper: "Fish to be fried . . . a meat pie . . . a gooseberry tart, Joan. And plenty of ale, Nan . . . and cakes. . . . Now hurry, wenches!" And on the instant of their departure—had Will heard of the new theatre, the Hope? The town was full of the talk of it. It was to be an addition to the Paris Gardens. Henslowe and Meade—surely Will remembered Meade, the great roaring, hairy bear of a waterman!—were building it. There would also be a new inn built in the Gardens, The Dancing Bears, and there Meade would live. It was to be the finest theatre in London, so they said. . . . Yes, for plays. Oh, and, of course, for bear- and bull-baiting too. They were a shrewd pair, those two! Had he heard they were opening the old Swan? And indeed London was play mad. Surely Shakspeare knew that the unreputable country parson, Daborne, whom astute old Henslowe had rescued from a debtors' prison, was going to have a company of acting children. Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* had proved a poor thing. And for her own part, she considered that Fletcher would never hit the public taste alone. But with Beaumont—It was true enough that their *Maid's Tragedy* had scantily pleased. But consider the *Scornful Lady*, which the town

had well liked, and their *Philaster*, over which it had gone mad! Chapman had deserted play-writing; was away somewhere, Southampton's guest, translating the great ancient Greek poet Homer, a task that would take months. Permitting her guest to extract what comfort he might from this schoolmanly preoccupation of his rival, Mistress Montjoy veered swiftly away from talk of Chapman, but so skilfully that, in another moment, they were discussing Jonson's latest success as though it flowed as a matter of course from the talk of Chapman and Homer. Ben's *Alchemist*, according to Mistress Montjoy, had positively fired London. Burbage, as usual, was playing the lead and according to Mistress Montjoy, with rare spirit. She confessed to as great a liking for Burbage as a misliking for his rival, Field. Compare Burbage with Field. She had seen his Richard—here Mistress Montjoy pulled herself up short as though suddenly remembering that her guest was a playwright—and Will's *Richard Third*—three times. Burbage stirred the blood, whereas Field— She herself had slept listening to Field's slow, cold chanting. She favoured the *Silent Woman* above all Ben's work—oh, yes, far beyond the *Alchemist*. But for an afternoon's entertainment, give her the *Woman Killed with Kindness* or the *Shoemaker's Holiday*. The woman did not live whose heart could not respond to the sadness of the one and the gaiety of the other. She had always said and would always maintain that Ben knew naught about women. She considered that the *Silent Woman* proved this contention. Had not *Epicæne*, his best woman, turned out to be a man? For herself, she liked plays that dealt with people like those about her; women she could have been and in scenes she might have known. Not for her the bloodless nymphs of the *Faithful Shepherdess* or *Philaster* on the one hand, the strange walking dolls that Ben made on the other. As for the *Woman Killed with Kindness*—there was a heroine might have been her own sister, Bess, so natural was she! And so on, and on, and on until Montjoy's grating voice called from below, "Aho there! Shall we never eat? 'Tis well said, 'A woman's tongue. . . .'"

The slow spring twilight had settled into complete darkness when Shakspeare at last pulled away from the Montjoys. A

long, slim new moon had slunk almost to the horizon. Yet it shed light enough to reveal a faint wet wash of street; blank parallel stretches of half-timbered walls; black rectangles of street signs. The night had turned chill; a sharp and knifelike wind searched out the openings in his cape. He drew it closer about him as he turned in the direction of Cheapside. Physically, the bath, the delectable hot supper, the delicious cool ale had refreshed him. But mentally——! He could not say that Mistress Montjoy's chatter had inspired him; at times, even, it had hurt: but at least for a while it had ousted from his mind the accumulated melancholies of the last three months. Now that her cheerful presence had gone, those humours flowed back in a sinister black flood. And indeed, one or two of Mistress Montjoy's remarks had pricked into faint being a dead desire, a lost regret. . . . Southampton and Anne . . . For an instant the old pain seared a fiery trail across his heart. Women named Anne had played important parts in his life, he reflected; Anne, his sister, the playmate of his childhood—pink-and-white, doll-faced, dead ere she had matured. Anne Hathaway, the sweetheart of his boyhood! Sleek-haired was Anne Hathaway and dove-eyed; the brown of the country sun struggling with the pink of the country air for the mastery of her cheeks. Anne, as round and warm as a pigeon—and as unthinking. And then Anne Davenant, the passion of his maturity. What had there been about Anne Davenant that could make a half-decade of agony in a sane man's life? She was not beautiful. He himself, in one of his bitter rebellions against her spell, had avowed that in verse. But there was something—— No, her face was not beautiful; it was the colour of whey and it kept, except at the creeping-in of her silver smile, a strange, still look. And her little flat figure was not beautiful, though it was so delicate that she moved like a shadow. Nor her jet-black, straight, coarse hair. Nor her rather slitted, heavily lidded eyes, so shadow-smooched, so vivid and sparkless. But the combination of all this with her mouth! Surely no woman had ever owned a mouth like Anne's—so wide-centred and deep-cornered, so cool and so warm, so lusciously crimson that, flaring out of the pallor of her face, it was like a blood-hot signal to the senses. Southampton and Anne . . . The image of his friend—and

rival—suddenly hung clear in his mind: the lithe, long, white-skinned youth with his chestnut curls and his brilliant colour; his brown eyes shot with red lights; his dashing aspect and his dreaming look; his profundities of thought; his elegances of expression. Well, at least now he could put the two names together in his mind without a sense of utter spiritual annihilation. And even as his pain dulled, their images vanished from his mental vision. His real problem lifted its gaunt face there.

Should he ever write again? Had it gone for good—that rushing, flooding impulse which, on command, had turned his youth to a creative orgy, had sometimes evolved and finished a play in a week? Was this paralysis but a temporary mental deadness or was it old age . . . the flickering out of the creative faculty? He had accommodated himself to many things in a lifetime of work. Once he had created the dramatic mode, had led. Now he followed, aped other men's efforts and at, it seemed, a slower and slower pace. Those younger blades of the drama—Beaumont, Fletcher. . . . How *they* poured it forth, and in what variety and with what felicity! Well, he must follow where their star led. Aye, he was content to follow, if he could only produce a big thing in the new mode. But he could produce nothing. What had happened to him or what was the fault in him? Always he had wondered—and now he considered the problem afresh—if a man's work were so closely engaged with a man's life that he must live a life especially constructed for that work. For himself, try as hard as he could to disengage himself from mortal tangles, he had had to live long segments of his life as though his work had not even existed. Southampton had, of course, dominated such a segment; Anne Davenant another. And whatever the cost of his work, he would not part with even the memory of that magic madness. Long living it had been with him at first and short working; then longer and harder working, shorter and shorter living; until now life was all working. Perhaps that was the flaw in him—that very concentration may have marred his quality.

Yet there was Ben! No man had worked harder than Ben; and Ben had for decades lived a life that was but pendant to his work. Of course, Ben's youth had sown vigorous wild oats . . . that interval in the Low Countries. For that

matter, Ben had killed his man and gone to prison. . . . But he had chosen London for the scene of the major portion of his work and in filthy, greasy, stinking London he had stayed, dominating the literary life of the town as indeed—there had never been an atom of jealousy in Shakspeare's admiration for Ben—he deserved to dominate it. On the other hand—Marlowe! At his youth's peak, Kit had thrown himself into the flaming abyss at the very centre of life, had let its fires eat his vitals; had died of his love of life; had died at the hands of life itself. Did Marlowe have the right of it? And Kyd and Greene—those wasters of heydey? “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Illium?” God, it was worth going out in one hell-hot stab at joy to have written those lines. They too—the whole trio—had stayed in the city, had drunk deep of its poison. Was, after all, the swift thrust at life the wiser way? However, it was useless now to regret that he had not followed other men's paths, led they to sanity or madness; for *he* could not stay in the city, try as hard as he would. Just as London had held him in hot enchantment in the beginning, she had released him frost-cold in the end. And then the country had begun to pull on him. He had deafened his ears to the luring plea as long as he could. But in the end, it had haled him back to Stratford—that low, wild-dove call. Another motive came in here—in honesty he had to admit it. He wanted to write the Shakspeare name strong on Stratford life again. It was a sacred duty; his father had laid it on him. *That* was one of the things a man must do; he had no choice there. And yet again—doubt. Should a poet engage in commerce with sacred obligations? What had he to do with that pale-blooded wench, Duty? Was not the poet his own law? Well, like the oaf he was, docilely, without question, he had followed the incitement of the Shakspeare blood. He had returned to Stratford. He had made the Shakspeare strain a power. New Place was pointed out, gaped at. . . . And Anne had risen in importance as his position increased. Of course, there had been the old wound of his years of absence in London, but that wound had healed. Anne was a placid woman whose heart held its own tenderness, rejected its own bitterness. And fate had brought her fair social fortune in her two daughters. Sukey had made a

notable match; Judy had been bridesmaid at the Harvard wedding. . . .

Perhaps it was because he was not entirely of the city nor entirely of the country that he wrote well of neither. The *Woman Killed with Kindness* . . . the *Shoemaker's Holiday* . . . Mistress Montjoy's babble again. . . . No, he never could equal either Heywood or Dekker in their chosen fields, he told himself. Once in an attempt to rewrite *Three Ladies from London*, he had essayed to paint the town and once, in *Cardenna*, the country. But he had failed; failed so lamentably that he gave over the blurred, confused, half-written things, the one to Heywood, the other to Fletcher. He himself liked to write of lands so far away, of times so long ago, or of countries and ages so entirely imagined that no critic could dispute his fancyings. Such a fantasy his new play was to be! If ever it came into existence at all . . . God, how tortured he was with its formlessness and vagueness! An island. Somewhere? No, nowhere. An island floating between sea and sky. An island as airy and gossamer as a cloud, as delicately imagined as a vision. And on it three beings. A maiden. A slim, pure, virgin thing, Mirandola? Mirala? Mironda? No, Miranda. Yes, that was it, *Miranda*. And an old man, a wiseacre, a sage—Prospero. An old man who had exorcised that island in a breath, could banish it in an eye-wink! "We are of such stuff as dreams are made of and our little life is rounded with a . . . sleep." Already some of the lines were drifting into his head. And then for contrast with those two, unnamed as yet, unbodied—for, strain mind and soul as he would, he could not see him—an ugly, misshapen creature, hobgoblin, leprechaun, gargoyle. The whole thing should be a film of faery—a work to make the *Night's Dream* seem of the earth and clodlike. The name was clear, *A Summer's Tale*.

And that was all!

That had been all for three months. The island and the three people on it and the name, *A Summer's Tale*. Perhaps it was too much of faery. At any rate, it hung impalpable, shapeless and colourless in the high, dry ether of his mind. Months, months, months, it had been since that fiery uprushing torrent of the spirit had made precipitation. Nothing he had done would produce more. Not thinking until his

brain turned. Not reading until his eyes ached. Not walking the lanes about Stratford until his legs cramped. Not talking until he hated the town and every soul in it. Not dreaming. Not cursing. So now to see what London would do—the London which, at his appearance, had opened her gate, tempted him with the clue to success, and then, by the mere poisonous hap that Anne Davenant visited there her sister, fed like a cold-crazed, thirst-crazed monster on the fires and dews of his youth.

It seemed to Shakspeare that he had been walking a long time, so fast and so painfully had his thoughts sped. Yet, in reality, it had been but a few moments from Silver Street to Cheapside and along Cheapside to the Mermaid Tavern. Only an occasional figure now and then had passed him on the street, and now he entered a silent courtyard. Hooded wagons made vague, looming shapes under a sprinkle of stars. In the shadows, horses fretted with hoof-pawings and tail-swishings. A white cat flashed from under his feet. But no human stirred, and the Inn was quiet. He made off at an angle toward the left, and at a corner room on the first floor, knocked with a peculiar and vibrant tattoo. Without waiting for a summons to enter, he opened the door and stood on the threshold of a fair-sized room, light in colour, heavily raftered, with big casement windows on two walls and a vast fireplace at one end.

His appearance produced an instant of petrification among the half circle of men sitting about the fire. Then, "By God, 'tis Will!" exclaimed the huge creature who was the keystone of their arch. He raised his unwieldy bulk off the double-sized stool which supported it and paddled like a hurrying bear toward the door. It was a bear-hug, too, to which he subjected Shakspeare, and after the embrace was over, he patted him on shoulders, arms, and back with his monstrous paws. "God's wounds, I'm glad to see you. Marry, you smell of the country, lad—clover and new-mown hay."

The others, except one who sat writing in a corner, crowded about Shakspeare. That other was a tall, lean, yellow fellow of a cadaverous and moustached mien. He made a sudden gesture, and instantly they all chanted in unison: "An upstart crow, that with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide,

supposes he is as able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you!" They ended with a vigorous "Hail, Will of Avon, hail!"

Shakspeare grinned as he shook hands with them—Burbage and Beaumont, Fletcher and Hemminge.

"How beats the tiger's heart?" the man in the corner asked cheerfully, still bending to his work.

"Fiery as of yore," Shakspeare averred, shaking his disengaged hand. "On my word, Tom Heywood," he declared to his interlocutor, "and be God my witness, when I departed for Stratford last spring, I left you scribbling in this corner and on my return, I find you busy at the self-same spot. How many plays have you writ in these twelve months?"

"Five!" Heywood declared laconically, stopping to twist his long, thin, out-standing yellow mustaches and to impale Shakspeare with a humorous glare from his cadaverous face. "And acted in all of them—and I've turned some verses besides. And according to my wont all writ on tavern bills."

"Not another heroic poem, I pray thee, Tom!" Shakspeare said with the out-handed gesture of one fending off offence.

Before Heywood could reply, the rafters rang with the long-sustained, boisterous derision of his companions. And so, instead of answering, he kept on tranquilly writing until they had stopped. "Keep up those alarums," he threatened, "and I write an epic to-night."

"Come close to the fire, Will," Ben Jonson ordered, "and let's see how the rural air likes thee." The company resumed their places in a crescent about the blaze. Hemminge placed a stool for Shakspeare at Jonson's right. "We lack cheer!" Jonson exclaimed, first peering into the depths of the enormous tankard which he held in a colossal paw and then shaking it with a circular motion. "What ho, boy!" he called. As there was no immediate response, "Boy! Boy!" he boomed in successive roars. And when the door opened on a peaked, smirched slice of scared boy face, "Bring us on wine, boy, Canary now, of the best and plenty of it. At once! You hear? I'll cut your gizzard out before your eyes and roast it at this very fire else." As the door precipitately closed, he turned on Shakspeare an enormous visage, all rounded leathery contours from which emerged at the chin a

straggle of black beard, picked with white, and above the forehead a scratch of hair, black and stiff as wire. Somewhere between the two and in the deepest folds of the leathery skin were set the mere black twinkles that were his extraordinary eyes. "Tell us of Stratford, Will. By God, bully boys, I long for green fields. The city tires and drags me. Some day, Will Shakspeare, I'll take you at your word and come to Stratford on a visit. 'Twas but yesterday Drayton and I spoke with longing of that future junket."

"Come, Ben, do!" Shakspeare entreated. "New place has rooms we use not. Come, all of you!" He smiled about the circle, now sitting on stools before the fire, their empty mugs beside them, their eyes on him. Then the smile crooked, shrank, disappeared as another consideration, more acerb, curdled it. "But talk we not of Stratford, I pray thee. It's yon accursed country quiet I've run away from. Give me talk of London. Odds, how I've thirsted for it! What's new here? No pretty chatter of court and politics an it please you, lads! I yearn for gossip of hussies and harlots, cut-throats and cutpurses, gulls and conies."

"Would you had but come a moment since," Dick Burbage answered. "The two Toms, Dekker and Middleton, were here and full of their new comedy the *Roaring Girl*. Knew ye ever Moll Frith, Will?"

Shakspeare nodded dissent. "But ever I've heard talk of her," he added.

"Well, yon twain have spent long days—and longer nights, 'tis likely—studying the ways of that fair filthy dame—their *Roaring Girl*. By Lady, Will, she's unpaired in my experience. Full of strange oaths and stranger talk. And tales! Man, she pours adventure as others pour out dullness."

"How looks she?" asked Beaumont's voice from the other end of their row. And, "Before God, Frank, we've seen the jade!" came Fletcher's comment from the same quarter. Burbage turned and crossed his legs in the direction of the query. As ever, when Burbage was present, Shakspeare followed his motions. How could a man so fleshed melt movement into a grace so exquisite? Just as on the stage, though tallow-faced and thickly featured, he transformed himself into a god. And as inevitably as Shakspeare watched his friend's motion, he listened for his friend's voice—that sleek,

silky voice that could make thunder of a whisper and turn every woman in the pit white with the stilled passion of its love-sighing. What a Romeo he had been—the beautiful noble face of him! And then his Richard, which had turned the affrighted city madams faint; had made them forget who wrote that Richard. Acting in the same play with Burbage, Shakspeare reflected whimsically, he had often acted better than he could—that voice had made him. Dick, Shakspeare reflected, had had his problems too. Should he have acted or painted? And had he chosen acting—Shakspeare had often pondered this—because of that old debt, or because it was easier drifting. . . .

Beaumont, on the other hand, presented always one aspect to the world, albeit a noble and beautiful one. He was the handsomest man of them all, tall and fair, golden-bearded, with wide-opened, strangely set green eyes; statuesquely cut as to figure. No one of them really knew Francis Beaumont, except it be Fletcher; and Shakspeare had his moments when he doubted if even John knew his partner and collaborator. It was not his university education that held them off from Beaumont or him from them; for both Fletcher and Jonson had equal learning. Or his court connections, for the Mermaid circle had the imperviousness to rank which associated genius often begets. No, it was a quality of remoteness from which nothing in life or any degree of living could ever free Beaumont. . . . What had dragged Beaumont down from those mental mountain fastnesses to go to play-writing?

Fletcher was as different from Beaumont as he well might be; little, dark, tousled-looking, effeminately made; of an extraordinary silver-wittedness, mental warmth and, above all, creative fecundity. John spawned plots as he talked. It was a perfect collaboration, Shakspeare had always thought; for Beaumont supplied judgment, taste, a sense of proportion, constructive ability, workmanlike scrupulosity, and a real poetic quality. Fletcher, on the other hand, brought to their work a virgin forest of thought and idea, plot and plan. Shakspeare admired and respected Beaumont, but he had a strange mental affinity with Fletcher.

"You'd remembered Moll Frith, had you seen her, John," Burbage informed Fletcher, dryly. "She's as tall as Frank and I'll not say as big, but bigger. She can hold two lads

with her one hand while she murders them with the other—a fist as big as the hoof of a horse. A handsome wench besides—red-headed and yellow-eyed. Her hair comes to her heels and sometimes it pleases her to wear it in that fashion. 'Tis a blaze then, running from her head to the ground. She's fought her way, every inch, to her bawdy throne. No woman loves her, nor would dare cross her, but would give her soul to be chosen as her friend. No man crosses her, nor would dare love her, but would give his ears to be picked as her swain. She's fleeced more gulls and conies—— Not at all unlike," he added, dryly, "although their spheres be far separate, our late noble virgin majesty, Elizabeth."

"'Tis pity, Will, you saw her not first," said Hemminge.

And at that, the room filled with ribaldry. The adoring reverence, the admiring worship that poor stupid John Hemminge held for Will Shakspeare was the jest and butt of the Mermaid Club. Ben, especially at this moment, shook like a mountain of jelly. Hemminge was placidly aware of his derision and as placidly indifferent to it. He turned now his big gray eyes—save for their love as expressionless as those of a hound—upon the object of his solicitude. He was a big, bulky creature—Hemminge. Beside Beaumont he was as a farm stallion to a knight's charger. Yet on their trips through the stews of the town, it was to John Hemminge, not to Beaumont, that the Dolls and Molls and Polls shot their first lewd welcomes of glance and greeting.

"True, John!" Shakspeare applauded, dryly. "'Tis pity I saw her not first. 'Tis pity—I know you think, and I agree—that any of these poor scribblers here was ever born to take from me dramatic share of the romance and poetry that lies bound in merry England."

"Oh, Will"—Fletcher turned the talk—"hast heard of Daborne and his new children's company? More 'little eyases' to make us trouble. Of the new theatre near the Paris Gardens. . . ."

The talk went on. The smoochy waiter lad—his scared eye scuttling at Jonson's every move to Jonson's face—filled their tankards with Canary again and again and again. The big fire died down at intervals, but someone always replenished it from a pile of logs at the side. When the flames burned high, they turned the little rounds of opaque glass in

the casements to files of glaring eyes; the room seemed crowded. They illuminated the farthest corner, except that one, already illumined by the flame of a candle, where twinkling Tom Heywood wrote steadily on, despite the talk—wrote steadily on even though he joined in that talk. The big plain room had an aspect of home to Shakspeare; for it had housed thousands of wine-bedewed, discussion-ridden nights whose talk had touched the stars. Every drawing on its walls was familiar to him, every ribald couplet. And the men in it were his friends, true and tried. Not that he had not had his differences, major and minor, with them; not that he liked them equally. But no one among them but was linked in some picturesque or glorious way into the chain of his London existence. And when the blaze died down to a softer glow that failed to pick out faces, its gleam on pewter tankards, on laughter-filled eyes, companioned the room again for him. Shakspeare listened and drew them out for stories; listened and, if the talk threatened to run into one of their uproarious duels of wit, drew them out again. But that did not happen often. By sheer force of will, he made it a night of anecdote and reminiscence. There was plenty of talk. There were the latest tales of Henslowe's niggardliness—no Mermaid night was a success without a Henslowe interval. From Beaumont there were stories of the production of the *Knight of the Burning Pestle*; from Fletcher, of the handsome way Tom Heywood had helped them in their satire on him; from Ben, of the production of the *Alchemist* and of the difficulties he was having with a new play, *Cataline*—"a damned dull drama of desperation!" he described it. So dull had it become, indeed, that he had begun a new, highly contrasting one. When the talk turned to the past, Jonson spun a long yarn of the week he and Marston and Chapman spent in prison the time *Eastward Ho!* was produced. Burbage told of his acting experiences as a child—those reminiscences went as far back as *Hieronimo*—interspersed with such bits of impromptu acting as made his auditors hold their breath. . . .

As long after midnight Shakspeare turned into Montjoy house, it was with a sense of perfect calm. All his melancholies had vanished in the high, clear wind of London talk. To-morrow he would sit him down and write, write—oh, God, how he would write!

But next morning, although the day was rare and the sun poured its heartening gold over the entire London world, though quill and white paper were close at hand, though Mistress Montjoy by whispered bribes or threats held the entire household under the spell of a quietude like death itself, write he could not. Eyes closed, mind held taut, he tried to re-live last night's rapturous mood; to distill it into the day's expression. All useless! He scribbled half-lines and broken phrases, drew strange amateur pictures, thought hard with his down-bent head clutched in his hands; thought hard, pacing the room the while, thought hard, face-down upon his bed. All useless! Anything else he might accomplish. But of a certainty one thing he could not do—and that was write. It added to his sense of gloom that out of his early-morning talk with Mistress Montjoy he had gleaned a coming trouble in the Montjoy family. The old dispute in regard to their daughter Juliet, and her dowry. . . . Montjoy and his son-in-law no longer spoke; there were whispers about a suit at law. Of course, in that case, he'd be summoned as a witness. Well, he'd stand with Juliet—the pet of his long years of living with the Montjoy family. This phantom care kept coming between him and his thought. Maddened at last by his ineptness and deadness, he seized his hat and cape; sallied forth. Automatically he made toward Cheapside.

It was a fair London scene, the day clear, the wind flaving but brisk; and in other times or in another mood, Shakspeare's heart would have leaped to the colour and bustle and gaiety of it all. Cheapside was crowded with shoppers and strollers; housewives with baskets; gallants in plumes and laces; homespun gawks from the country, pop-eyed with amaze. The shops were wide, and the brilliant sun caught on diamonds and jet, on taffeta and linsey-woolsey, on silver and leather, on feathers and laces. Above, swinging vigorously in the wind, the shop-signs made a moving aerial frieze, painted in violent scenes with colours equally violent. Horsemen passed with an imperious swiftness through the crowd which edged off to give them room. Once, one of the decade's new-fangled riding-contrivances—a coach—drove leisurely, with its span of horse, into their midst. Still a rarity in that busy district, it provoked all the ridicule, ribaldry, and raucousness of which the 'prentices of Cheap were capable, notwithstand-

ing the lovely lady inside, who, displaying a rosy indignation, hastily put on her mask. In the midst of all this, an inquisitive fellow lolling at his work, an idle eye raking the street, got glimpse of Shakspeare. Immediately his shrill cry, "Ho, lads, 'tis Will Shakspeare! Will of the Globe! Will of the King's men!" was caught up by his fellows till all about the streets rang with "Hi, Will!" and "Ho, Will!"

Shakspeare doffed his hat and waved it with his most professional—and mechanical—smile. How his heart had jumped the first time Cheap had cheered him! He had not written, on that long-ago thrilled day, a single word—but it was not from mental sterility, only from surplusage of charmed emotion. Now that chorus was as hollow to him as the beating of a child's hand on a drum. He was conscious only of the city stinks and, for the first time, of a longing for the sweet freshness of the Warwickshire air. "Hi, Will! Ho, Will!" The cry ran down the street as successive lines of shopmen took it up. Shakspeare continued mechanically to smile, gracefully to wave his hat. Presently the cheers ran down. He turned on the bridge, slowed down his brisk walk to a saunter. Now the scene, though less gay, was more beautiful. He stopped and listlessly surveyed it. The Thames—it was the brief interval between tides—stretched like a vast carpet of satin, taut except where now and then, as though insecurely fastened, it rippled in the breeze: and blue save where the sun—— His mind made little flicker at verse. "Faint, gilded pools where yet the——" And then it caught with violence on that oral snag, *gilded*, and ceased. Was ever poet haunted by a single word as he by *gilded*? A cold, stark disgust with certain crystallized habits of expression added its burden to his mood. Apathetically he continued to gaze on the scene.

Boats were gliding from shore to shore over the suave river surface, and the cries of the boatmen, "Eastward ho!" and "Westward ho!" came in a faint music to his ears. Close to the banks swans drifted. Along the north shore—flower gardens linking them softly with the river and the velvet lawns holding them rigidly apart—stretched the splendid pile of palaces which was the haughtiest element in the city's many-faceted beauty. Along the same bank, but back of him, nondescript shops and dwellings ran to the square, geometric

gray hulk of the Tower. Between them, as though offering sacred barricade against social admixture—huge as a great ship, but anchored—bulked St. Paul's. Beyond them all, made soft by the city's spire-pierced smoke, rolled vivid green hills. Across the river, the theatres and gardens, the stews and bagnios huddled together as though in a desperate effort to conceal the true quality of their entertainment. And apart from them all, wrapped in austerity, St. Mary's Overy mourned and meditated. The breeze flawed. One moment it brought strongly to his nose the odours from the palace gardens; another it carried faintly to his ears the roar of the lions in the Tower.

After a while, he moved—almost without direction—on. His professional eye, sweeping the South Bank, had noted that no flag hung out at the Globe. No performance that day. He wondered vaguely why. In the same apathy, but following his habit, he looked up as he passed off the bridge to the superstructure which topped it. Yes, his luck symbol of other days—the skull of some poor long-dead, traitorous devil which had always seemed, most amiably and encouragingly, to grin on him—still stuck to its pike.

He had thought he would continue on to the Globe, but the absence of the flag changed his mind. After a moment of indecision, he turned to the left, plunged into a maze of tiny streets. They grew broader and more residential in character as they pulled away from London Bridge. Finally, he came to a trim little common. On the daisy-specked grass, children were playing. A line of geese drew a white streak over the green as they rocked toward the watering trough in the centre. At one of the small houses, half-timbered and of a smiling domestic appearance, Shakspeare paused, knocked.

"Why, it's Master Shakspeare!" exclaimed the black-eyed, warmly hued woman who opened the door to him. And frankly she held up the bursting bloom of her lips to his kiss. "How now, Mistress Harvard," Shakspeare answered, saluting her. "How dare'st flower so in the London air? Or is it Stratford roses that still glow in thy cheek? And how fairly you are placed!" he added, as she conducted him inside.

The room they entered was bigger than, from the outside,

the house seemed able to contain. High casements were partly open to the breeze and, burning through their bulleyes, the sun had flecked the floor with its own marquetry. At one side, a bunch of spring posies filled a pewter bowl; and the bowl lay beside a big volume that nearly covered the table. Mistress Harvard drew a chair—high-backed and carved—for Shakspeare, seated herself in another, the hand of each arm clasping the dimpled elbow of its fellow. "Tell me of Stratford," she begged, her big eyes, a trifle too full for real beauty, dancing; the warm colour flooding and receding. Shakspeare conscientiously told her the news of the town. That was what interested her most, though she made perfunctory inquiries as to his work, ending with—was it a new play had brought him to London? To Shakspeare's great relief, however, she did not ask its name, nor what it was about. Adroit as he was in conversation—and he had enough instinctive sympathy and sense of humour to produce unlimited volume of even Mistress Harvard's kind—he was conscious of a feeling of relief when her husband appeared.

John Harvard was one of the few of the younger generation in Stratford with whom Shakspeare had a real mental clutch. He was a big, raw-boned man; his broad shoulders in perpetual stoop; his gray eyes always gaunt with his midnight studying. Harvard had none of the poet in him; but he was a student of an inspired order.

Shakspeare had often gone to him when, in his work, he struck snags of history, science, medicine, or the law. The big book on the table, a recent purchase which he immediately displayed to Shakspeare, was an evidence of a scholarly rather than a religious trend in him. It was that new version of the Bible, of which for months there had been so much talk. The two men drew up to the table, lost themselves in examination and discussion. "We have it not yet at Trinity," Shakspeare said.

In the meantime, Mistress Harvard slipped out of the house. When she returned she was carrying a struggling, lusty, round-cheeked urchin whose eyes—as big and black as his mother's—were pouring tears at being yanked untimely from his play. "'Tis young John Harvard!" Mistress Harvard interrupted the two men to announce, "and you may tell them all, Will Shakspeare, when you go back to

Stratford, that you had to come to London to see a child who was born a man."

He had called on the Harvards—Shakspeare admitted it frankly to himself—not so much for old friendship's sake as in the hope that talk with Harvard would set those diamond-sharp creative wheels in motion. But no such phenomenon manifested itself. Their talk, enthusiastic on Harvard's side, perfunctory on his own, had resulted in nothing—that is if you called that sudden burning desire, unexpected as it was uncontrolled, for Stratford nothing; that sudden avid itch for the country quiet, the large lustred country stars, the dew-wetted, cooling dark, the country sunshine with its flower smells and summer colouring, nothing. . . .

The game was up!

London had failed him. To-morrow he would go back to New Place.

He did not know—so long and aimlessly had he wandered the Bankside streets—how he came to arrive at the Globe. Habit, of course, he reflected, wearily. He had gone like a homing horse straight to the familiar stall. But once at the Globe, he suddenly found himself fatigued. He went in.

Ah, that was the reason the flag was not up! And, of course, now he remembered that in the course of a long droning talk from his point of view as secretary of the Globe, Hemminge had told him last night that the theatre was closed temporarily! Some unexpected repairs after the ravages of the winter storms had suddenly become necessary. A pair of carpenters—rough fellows enough—were pulling up the rotten boards in the centre under the big blue patch of open sky. At the side was a pile of fresh boards; tools. Shakspeare seated himself on a second pile of boards, surveyed with the lacklustre eyes the empty boxes, the long stage protruding into the body of the house. The carpenters gave one look in his direction; accepted him apparently as a part of this strange theatrical world; went on with their talk. Low-voiced at first, it presently ignored him, rose to a normal tone. The sun lifted higher and higher. An agreeable wood smell emanated from the boards which made his seat. Shakspeare fell into a muse that was so without thought that it was almost without consciousness. It was as though his will, ex-

hausted by his efforts, had dropped her hand from the wheel of creative impulse; had gone to sleep. The younger carpenter had been talking about his strange adventure for a minute or two before his words began to penetrate to Shakspeare's hearing. For that interval, vaguely soothed by his own mental quiet, Shakspeare tried not to hear him. Then one detail more acid than the rest broke into that void, roused all his sense of life to sudden ravenous sensitiveness. He listened.

"Aye, Rafe," he was saying, in answer to his companion's question; "I be sailor ever since I was lad. Aye, I was one of Sir Jarge Summer's men. Aye, I took that voyage into the new western sea. Aye, I seen and heard things thou'd not believe, man!"

Rafe was older and dry: a hollow-cheeked, dull-eyed, lantern-jawed yokel—Shakspeare knew the type well enough—full of yawning buffoonery and ribald skepticisms. "Aye, Stephen," he commented, with a burst of laughter. "Well, I know you sailormen and your tales and your lies. I mind me, my wife's brother went with Raleigh to Ginny. What he told—— We doused him well in the horse-trough one morn, and after that, his tales grew smaller."

Stephen laughed too—and not ill-naturedly. He could afford to laugh. He was a big, black-browed, thick-bodied lad with a neck like a bull's. As he tore and lifted, Shakspeare saw through his ragged shirt the swift play under the skin of muscles netted with blue and red tattoo. He had a long, sea-cleared gray gaze that now took quiet measure of his fellow. Perhaps it was the certainty that he could have thrown the skeptic over his head that made him answer mildly: "Aye. 'Tis true. Sailormen do oft make romance where the plain truth would seem more strange." And then he followed this statement by an irritating—but beguiling—silence.

For a moment no sound fell but the splintering of planks, the hammering home of wooden nails.

"Tell thy tale, Stephen," Rafe suddenly burst out. "For aught I know, ye be the first truthful sailorman that e'er I met. Tell thy tale in peace. I'll give thee my ears."

"'Tis strange," Stephen answered. "'Tis passing strange—this tale of mine. And I ask no man to put his faith on't.

Yet 'tis no lie! I give ye but God's truth and there's an end on't. We sailed from London—as good and strong a crew as e'en the queen, good Bess, God rest her soul, could e'er have wanted. Englishmen all—save one. And that one, a black-avised fellow—not blackamoor, you understand; yet hairy as an ape with a face so gnarled and strange 'twould frighten children. 'A was humped a little in the back and 'a swung in's walk. And 'a had arms so bulged with strength 'a could squeeze a man to death like a bear. Rings 'a wore in his ears, of gold, and a kerchief on's head, red and yellow, gay as a fairing and a knife in's belt as had a curving blade would carve a man's guts out at one stroke. His name was some outlandishness we ne'er could twist our tongues to . . . so called we him Cal."

"Those little twisty men be fearsome powerful in the wrestle," Rafe declared.

"We sailed with fair weather and the fair weather sailed with us. The sea—'twas as smooth as—smooth as—smooth as the top of the mug when the foam's settled. 'Twas a glad crew we were at first, too; full of japes and jests and the strange talk of land and sea all sailorfolk know. But one thing we lacked—drink. 'Twas a skipper that knew the sea and a brave trouncer of men, but a niggard of grog. The days crept by and still no grog. Came more days and still none. The men fretted and murmured. But the sun kept with us and there was no real crying out until we struck the islands——"

"What islands, Stephen?" Rafe asked.

"The Bermoothes, man. Hast not heard what Sir Jarge Summers found? A group of little islets, some no bigger than your hand, some bigger than all London town, spread out on a sea, green and blue, like a peacock's tail. We hove to there and rested. Sir Jarge and his fellows went ashore to see if there might perchance be treasure of gold or precious stones——"

"And were there treasure?" Rafe cut in, eagerly.

"Not that I have heard. But once they'd gone, among us crew, the murmurs grew for grog. Grog we asked—grog! If not—plain beer or ale. But whene'er we asked—polite and civil though we were—plain *no* was all we got. So one night, late, this hairy man, this Cal, he steals him a firkin

of wine from the ship's stores and three of us—me and him and old frosty gaffer, Trink—we three slipped over the side of the ship into a boat and rowed us to the shore."

"'Twas fair venturesome," Rafe commented.

"Venturesome. You'd say venturesome, indeed, knew ye all. But list! Over the island we went, stopping to gaze at all about us and drinking as we gazed. 'Twas passing fair, that scene; flowers like jewels and sweet-smelling shrubs; no high trees but bushes that were mountain-size and all a-bloom and birds that sang most hurtsome sweet. And the air so glad and soft. . . . We gazed and gazed, and the more we gazed, the more we drank and the more we drank, the more we gazed. . . . And then the dusk came on and still we gazed and drank. But once 'twas dark, by God, fear caught us. For lights began to come, to flash in the air, to dance; lights so thick and big and bright as though the stars had fallen, and always a-dance, here, there, everywhere. . . ."

"'Twas glowworms!" Rafe skeptically announced.

"Man, I say 'twas dancing lights; there, low on the ground; here, higher than a man's head. They sparked and went out and sparked again. We tried at first to catch one—as well cry to catch and hold the sunshine. And then a great fear came across us for, on a sudden, we saw—not far off, yet so near we could have touched him—a little minnikin. . . ."

"A little minnikin? What mean ye?"

"A little man-thing, no taller than my arm. It danced before us—all wound up in white, mist-like, with shining jewel eyes and mouth that smiled, beguiling, like a maid's. And 'a beckoned! We chased it. Cal, Trink, and me, in the fairy light we chased it, over hill and brook, through briar and bush; but still we caughted it not. 'Twas, fairy too—it floated with unfair aid from wind and breeze. But on we ran, and on and on. And as we ran a tempest came—tempest with roaring thunder as broke my ears and such lightning as split the sky in twain, twin sheets of fire. And rain—'twas like a monster fagot pack beating us on backs and faces. And in that tempest, all the fairy lights went out; the minnikin leapt away. But fright had sucked the very guts from out us! We ran in that pouring sea till we could run no longer; fell; raised up; ran once more, staggering-like, till we all three

dropped on our faces—slept, with the tide of rain pouring on us; slept till noon. . . .”

“And what came of it?” asked Rafe.

“Naught! When we woke ’twas bright blue day, the sun shining round in the sky. The minnikin—we saw it not again. But through it all, Trink holds him fast to the firkin. And when we two, Cal and me, woke chatter-toothed, ‘Here’s my comfort!’ says Trink; and pulls long at the wine.”

“And how came you back to the ship?” Rafe demanded.

“Oh, they put out from the ship a gang who searched until they found us.”

“And what punishment gave they you?”

“Irons for sennight and bread and water in the hold. But Sir Jarge—too pleased he was a’d found the Bermoothes to hold his anger long—so soon on deck we came and made our voyage fair and safe to England.”

“How now—did Cal and Trink mind them of that minnikin after their drink had passed?” Rafe asked, shrewdly.

“Never came we twain together without talk of it,” Stephen asserted, gravely. “I see him now—the little misty wight, with eyes a-mock like elves, lips smiling, beguiling like a maid’s, and wee hands beckoning. . . .”

Shakspere arose from his seat as from a dream. He moved so quietly that Stephen and Rafe took no note of his departure. He walked slowly at first, then swiftly across the bridge, up Cheapside to Silver and Muggle. As he neared the Montjoy house, he broke into a run. Once indoors, “What’s happened to thee, Will Shakspere?” Mistress Montjoy asked. “Thy eyes are coals; thy colour fever-high.”

Shakspere did not answer her query. “Send up paper to me, mistress,” he begged. “All thou hast and then send out for more!” He ran, light as a lad, over the stairs. Once in his room, he seated himself at the table; drew a blank sheet to him. Writing swiftly, he inscribed, *A Summer’s Tale*. Then he drew a line through the title; wrote

THE TEMPEST

Scene: A ship at sea.

A storm with thunder and lightning.

MARGARET BLAKE

By CHESTER T. CROWELL

From Century

I WAS fourteen years of age when Howard and Margaret Blake became our nearest neighbours. They built a house about a quarter of a mile from ours. Up to that time the nearest house had been two miles away. It seemed to me that the country was actually becoming crowded. Howard was about twenty-two years old, and Margaret, his wife, was about eighteen. It interested me to learn that they were going to try to make a living on six hundred and forty acres of ground or, as we then called such a tract in Texas, a section. My own parents had settled there in the days of no fences and had bought ten sections, probably for about twenty-five cents or less an acre. Even that much land was a farm; ranches would contain not fewer than twenty thousand acres.

Ours had always been a farming community. It was settled largely by Southern people and was as different from ranch country as though we had been people of a different race and nationality. The ranch country was uncouth, saloons flourished in the towns, and there were very few women. Our community had never permitted a saloon; we had a puritanical rigidity in our social customs that could scarcely have been excelled by any New England community. Our tiny little town of not more than eight hundred population had five or six pine church houses with the paint peeling off their clapboard steeples, blistered by a merciless summer sun on the outside and scorched by sulphur and brimstone sermons on the inside. In that time and place people took their religion with a thrill of terror. A man who said he loved God meant that his vertebræ rattled from panic fear when he contemplated the fate of the sinner.

Howard Blake was a hard-working man, as every pioneer

had to be, but he knew how to work and he liked it. Maggie—in a rural community Margaret would inevitably become Maggie—was usually with him. She helped him build the house, the barns, sheds, fences, chairs; she even helped him skin a calf when it had been killed. Meat had no commercial value then, but hides could be sold. As they worked they talked. It was evident they were very much in love with each other. In all my life I have never known another woman who so easily and naturally entered into the thoughts as well as the work of a man. I was always delighted to be with them. Sometimes when it rained, or on Sunday afternoons, they would lie down together on a pallet of wolf hides on the front porch, and Howard would laugh almost continuously for two or three hours, a pleasant sort of chuckle.

It was not until years later that I realized Howard was laughing because he was so happy he couldn't keep from laughing. She was his wife, his mistress, his sweetheart, his business partner, and the person he liked best to talk with. Such complete happiness must come to two people only rarely. I never heard them quarrel, and it is my honest opinion that they never did, for both were overflowing with generosity of spirit, and each was more than equal to any of the demands our primitive life made upon their energy.

Maggie was about five feet eight inches tall and rather slender, but with a large frame and large, but shapely, hands and feet. The first time I saw her I thought she was beautiful. Most persons would. Her eyes were a sort of hazel blue, and they not only smiled, but seemed to say in a hearty booming voice: "Welcome! You and I are going to be great friends." Meeting her was more like a reunion than getting acquainted. Within five minutes you had known her all her life. She brightened a cloudless spring morning for me with such a smile the first time I saw her, and then produced a piece of gingerbread about the size of a brick, and an enormous cup of buttermilk. They don't make such cups any more, and very little of such gingerbread. I was hers for life. Much as I loved gingerbread, however, I still think it was the spell of Maggie that got me. I remember watching her bare arms.

Howard and Maggie were very comfortably settled in their home before the year was out. They had made a good crop,

they had a garden and some flowers, and they were gradually making the interior of the house pretty after the fashion of the day, which wouldn't be much admired now, but I thought it was wonderful. Maggie seemed to be blooming like the flowers. Her face was rounder and had more colour; her arms were rounder, and she must have gained thirty pounds in weight. People said she "was the picture of health," and the neighbours expressed delight that our climate agreed with her so thoroughly, because it didn't agree with every one; the dryness was especially damaging to pretty complexions. Women whose faces were burned by the dry wind and who lost weight until their collar-bones became painfully prominent used to talk a great deal about Maggie's good fortune.

I was out with my dog one morning chasing rabbits on a hillside in the pasture when I saw old Doctor Wren drive up to the Blake place. I ran back home and told my mother. She put on her bonnet and went over there at once. The next day I was introduced to Howard Blake, Junior, who lay blinking at the sunlight with eyes so exactly like his mother's that it seemed he was already doing his best to smile a welcome as she did.

About five days later Howard and Maggie and I went hunting together, and Howard killed a deer. To me her going was nothing remarkable, but I can recall that it was the one subject of conversation at our table when women neighbours visited my mother. What interested them just as much was the fact that Maggie's pregnancy had never been apparent; she was evidently one of those rare women who enjoy the very zenith of good health in that condition.

I was very fond of the baby; the idea that boys do not like babies is a mistake growing out of the fact that dislike attracts more attention. They used to ask me sometimes to stay with the baby, and I never counted it a service. I remember how the little fellow used to crow like a young rooster when his mother returned, and his tiny little legs and hands would all be going at once, not feebly, but so rapidly and vigorously I doubt if one could have counted the motions of a single hand or foot. When she picked him up he would give a great sigh of happiness and then become very still, but his eyes would follow her face every moment until he fell asleep. When they sat looking at each other so, the picture

was one of indescribable beauty. No wonder so many artists have been moved to paint mother and child. But it cannot really be done, because there is mystery about that beauty. It isn't entirely for the eye. No; the very air is vibrant with it. The windows of the soul are opened to light and fragrance never sensed before. I have known husbands who were so dazed by the wonder of such a scene that they were suddenly embittered by a feeling of their own pitiful unimportance. Having given all he had to give an adored wife, the husband would realize at such a moment that she had passed into a new world beyond even male imagination, much less experience, and it would hurt cruelly. But Howard Blake was not such a one. He couldn't share it; no man could: but he worshipped at the shrine, and in a little while she came back to be his sweetheart and partner. A great many women forget to come back, but Maggie always came back quickly.

The following year, just after the crops were laid by, Howard Blake died. Typhoid fever, I think it was. He was ill only about two weeks. Death had always seemed very remote to me up to that time; some ghostly tale based on hearsay. Grief, in which was mixed considerable terror and enormous concern about his welfare in the next world, made me ill. Maggie stood the shock much more bravely. For a month there was a frightened look in her eyes, but she went resolutely about the work of the farm, and it was very soon evident that the property was going to be just as well cared for as ever. Farm hands could be hired for from eight to ten dollars a month, and they worked from dawn until dark, which was usually more than twelve hours. She never had any trouble getting "hands." They liked to work for her. It came to be understood that she could have the pick of them. They said she treated them well. I think they fell under her spell just as I did. She had a way of inspiring a man to tell her all about himself and his life. It was largely through these farm hands that she later knew what was going on in the town and community, after her contact with other people had ended. She knew how to give orders simply and sensibly, and her orders were always intelligent. She knew the business. I have often marvelled at her fortitude during this period, because I know her grief was terrible. The vital spark, the will to live, and her physical strength gave recuper-

ative powers I have never seen equalled. I do not think she had the slightest tendency toward brooding or introspection; in fact, her mind gave her little concern. Her intelligence was a great store of common sense. Abstract ideas bounced off her good-natured ignorance like so many rubber balls tossed at a brick wall. I doubt if she had ever read a single book.

I was then at an age when religion attacks a young man with considerable virulence and quite frequently entangles him in what he will later realize was a most amusing Chinese puzzle. I used to try to talk to her about religion sometimes, but I finally gave up. At first I was hurt because I thought she was not willing to share her ideas with me on account of my youth, but I finally discovered, to my astonishment, that she hadn't any ideas on that subject and not many on any other. In the normal course of events that should have cooled our friendship very appreciably, but it didn't. I don't remember that I liked her one bit less.

Some six months after Howard Blake's death, Sam Hodge, a young farmer who lived about four miles away, began calling regularly on Maggie. Sam was about twenty-eight years old, and I think it must be in some measure descriptive of the man to say that is just about all I remember about him. Other young men called on Maggie sometimes. One day my father asked me not to go there very often as I might be considered a suitor and he knew I had no such thought. That shocked me somewhat, but I worshipped my father and stood in awe of his wisdom. That was a day when boys were whipped unmercifully because of the injunction, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." My father was one of the few who spared the rod, and he won in return a loving obedience to his merest wish. I took it for granted that such a good man was in direct communication with God and knew everything.

I was very much preoccupied about that time with my religion. It was desperately serious for me, and I was puzzled because no one else seemed to understand that fact. Here was my immortal soul trembling, skidding, struggling, and crying out for light in about the most orthodox community one could imagine, and I couldn't get help. Then something happened that made me an atheist. I was running true to form for my age. It is my observation that a religious up-

heaval followed by a period of atheism in late adolescence are unfailing indications of good health and normal mental development. My atheism was superinduced by a tragedy in the lives of two very dear schoolmates. They were older than I by several years, but we had played together and been friends. The girl, Bessie, was engaged to the boy, Tom. They were to have been married in June, and they went out together three or four nights a week. They were models of good behaviour and extremely religious. Tom didn't even use tobacco. For some reason that always counted on the credit side of a man's devotion to religion in our community. I heard my mother tell my father what happened. She said:

"They let their foot slip."

He smiled, rather amused, I thought. Then he said:

"Well, they can get married right away."

"Bessie won't," my mother said.

"What!" Father exclaimed

And then Mother told the story. Bessie felt that she was not fit to marry any one. Tom, it seemed, was so shocked and puzzled that all he did was say he was "willing to marry her just the same." If he said it like that, it must have sounded like condescending to accept an inferior. As a matter of fact, I later learned that Tom didn't know whether Bessie was right or not. His instinct and common sense told him it didn't matter, but there was such a furor about it all that the mean little streak in him came out, and he began to wonder whether he was risking himself. He wanted to take good care of Tom. Bessie was merely living up to what she had been taught all her life, and now when her parents turned against their own teachings and tried to hurry the wedding, she considered them as vile as herself. In the midst of the scandal—and there need never have been one—Bessie ran away and entered an ordinary public house. She committed suicide there about two weeks later. My point of view had been just about the same as Bessie's. But right then and there my point of view underwent a violent change. I was an atheist and I wanted every one to know it. I wanted to fight about it.

I told Maggie about Tom and Bessie. She expressed no opinion. I think she was the only person who ever heard the story without expressing an opinion. She laughed. It

was an interesting story, and she enjoyed hearing it. Her laugh was an expression of appreciation for the entertainment I had provided in telling it.

Everyone supposed about this time that Maggie and Sam Hodge would be married. They had been "keeping company" for about five months, but he suddenly ceased to visit her. Everyone who knew either of them asked the reason, but none was given. Hodge was sullen. Maggie said she didn't know.

One day the news spread through the community that Maggie had a new baby. Old Doctor Wren said she made no secret about Sam Hodge being the father and asked him to file the birth certificate at the county seat: "Sam Hodge, Junior, son of Sam Hodge and Margaret Blake." That is what he did. Later my father told me that it was taken before the grand jury, but as there seemed to be no complaint from any one, they didn't know what to do about it, and so did nothing.

The child was born on a Monday. The following Sunday Maggie went to church as usual. She never failed to go to church. I was there with my parents. Everyone gasped except my father. I think he was amused. The preacher glowered at her, but made no reference to her presence. After church everyone scampered away instead of gathering in little groups as usual to talk. They were afraid Maggie might join one of the groups. She was very sociable. No one spoke to her, and very few looked at her. Those who did were hostile and tried to stare her out of countenance, but it couldn't be done. She returned their gaze as steadily as a calf and very much as a calf might. Her eyes were always smiling; so she was the picture of good health, good humour, and boundless friendliness. There was nothing brazen or combative about her attitude.

On the way home from church I heard the word, "illegitimate" for the first time. It aroused my curiosity. I wanted to see what an illegitimate child would look like. A boy brought up, as I had been, on a remote farm works out his own jumbled ideas on social laws. No odium attached to an illegitimate child in my mind at the time. Since only married people had children, it seemed to me quite a remarkable feat

Maggie had performed to produce a child without being married. So I slipped over there that afternoon to see it. Maggie welcomed me just as usual. I found no change of any kind in her. The baby cried when it waked, and she picked it up as though she were going to toss it into the air like a ball. She raised it above her head, then brought it to her breast and fed it.

"You've got a good appetite, Sam Hodge," she said. I winced when the name was pronounced, but I soon got over it. She always called the baby Sam Hodge. I examined this new and scandalous arrival with great care. There seemed to be nothing illegitimate about him. In spite of the fact that I had liked Howard Blake and didn't care about Sam Hodge one way or the other, this baby was beyond question adorable.

The following day I was sent to town to buy some supplies at the store. While I was there Maggie came in on a similar errand. The clerk started, then stiffened and stared. Maggie was smiling at him with her eyes and ordering "a side of bacon." The clerk was rummaging through such few ideas as had ever lodged in his head to determine whether he could sell a side of bacon to the mother of an illegitimate child. I don't think he decided that he could, but he was unable to think of any reason why he couldn't, so he reluctantly performed the task. By the time she had got down her list to coffee and soap, however, the shock was over, and the clerk was agreeable.

I have often wondered since then how much of just that sort of thing Maggie had to confront. She could scarcely avoid ten human contacts a month even though living far from the town and on her own farm. All of them must have been about the same as that with the grocer's clerk, and perhaps some of them were much worse. Whatever they were, Maggie never mentioned them, and I honestly believe, after years of mature deliberation, that they made no impression upon her whatever. I think she was glad to have another boy whether it was legitimate or not. Nature seemed to exact no penalty from her for the fulfilment of this desire, and if society wanted to, she was willing to let them enjoy it. There was another phase of her character at work for her defence also. Women simply did not exist for her. She

neither liked nor disliked them. They were blanks. Naturally they were the most aggressive in registering the outraged community's feelings. I do not believe she was ever able to grasp the idea of a man disapproving of her, or ever believed that one really did. I learned in later years that she had been very much petted by an adoring father. Her two elder brothers had been very good to her. She married young, and her relations with her husband had been perfect. I doubt if she had ever of her own experience found any serious obstacle to pleasant relations with any man she ever met. I know of several in that community who cheated on weights and measures and had to be bargained with very carefully, and I know that they did not try to cheat her.

The very dissimilar behaviour of Bessie and Maggie under the test taught me something that I remembered to my profit in many a trying situation. The issue of life and death was within themselves. Up to that time I had thought the community killed Bessie and that with the same circumstances the community was able to kill any human it chose to slay. I learned that so far from killing Maggie, it couldn't even bruise her. It is to be regretted that Maggie's victory cannot be attributed to a great intellectual achievement. That would be far more dramatic. But I suppose many victories have been gained by simply not thinking at all.

Maggie never asked Sam Hodge to help her; she needed no help. But Sam always felt that he ought to have undertaken the expense of the child. At first he feared it would be demanded of him. In his own mind he was preparing to resist. Then when no demand of any kind was made, remorse overtook him. He became more sullen than ever. I don't know why Sam didn't marry Maggie. Perhaps he won her too easily, and it frightened him. He probably expected the use of some pressure at first and was instinctively resisting in his own mind. Afterward, I feel sure, he regretted that he didn't marry her, not on moral grounds, but because he had let slip an opportunity to assure himself a happy life.

If Maggie had been silent and ashamed, it would have ruined her and protected him, but everyone knew she called the child Sam Hodge and that Sam had run away like a frightened dog. I have thought since, too, that if Sam had done very much for her, it would have been a serious injury

to her. As it was, one had to admire her pluck and independence.

When a fence was blown down or broken Maggie would not report it to her neighbour. She would go out and fix it herself. That act of consideration for their feelings cut deep. It is all very well to turn your back on someone, but if you discover that he is assisting you in a kindly and unobtrusive manner, your gesture is robbed of much of its meaning. The sting may be there for the other person, but certainly you can get no pleasure out of it.

The community was mystified by Maggie's knowledge of its sick list. No one talked to her any more, but she always knew who was sick. I suppose the farm hands told her. I still visited her sometimes, but I didn't tell her. It seemed humiliating to be helping people who hated her, and I wanted her to fight. In her sick visits she was considerate just as she was in other contacts. She would not go with things to eat that had to be presented. She would go quietly in and wash some clothes or scrub a floor. She could perform such tasks with astonishing rapidity. Those were real helps to sick housewives. Maggie was not winning her way back into the community's social life, but she was winning toleration. She continued to go to church, and I remember that her strong voice rose clear and good-natured above most of the others. She liked to sing, and it would be like her to sing a little more loudly than most other women. After a few months the scandal ceased to be news, and most persons forgot about it. One day when I visited Maggie I learned that several other young men also did. They were secretive about it, just as I was; but there was no change in her, so her company was as pleasant as ever. The pleasure of a visit haunted one, and I found it not easy to remain away a long time. There was a glow and thrill about those visits and something vitalizing and stimulating about coming in contact with so much health. Anywhere else gingerbread was just gingerbread, but at Maggie's house it seemed to burst out of the oven for sheer joy of living.

And then Godfrey Wickwire began to call on Maggie. He had a hardware store in the town. He used to ride out on his horse late in the afternoon. He called about twice a week, one visit usually being on Sunday afternoon. People

took an interest at once and secretly hoped that Maggie would soon be Mrs. Wickwire and eventually have a father for her two boys. They didn't say anything so pleasant and charitable, but they wished her good fortune in spite of themselves. Wickwire was about thirty years old; there was nothing remarkable about him, either bad or good. He was singularly devoted to hardware and knew his business. After five months of devoted attention in the form of regular visits Wickwire ceased to be seen in the neighbourhood. He was very much in love with Maggie. Wickwire had some depth of character; I don't think Hodge was capable of love, but Wickwire was. I think he wanted desperately to marry Maggie, but the sight of that baby whom she always called by the full name, Sam Hodge, probably was too much for him. At any rate, he struggled with himself for months and finally did not marry her. Nearly everyone was sorry. By this time Maggie had a lot of sympathy even if none of it was ever exhibited in her presence.

Then came another baby boy, and she again looked blandly at Doctor Wren and gave the name of the father, Godfrey Wickwire. This time feeling in the community was terrible. Probably a number of persons had said something charitable about Maggie in the preceding three months, and now she had made fools of them. Sentiment was much more intense than the first time. There was a little talk of having a committee call and ask her to leave. There can be no doubt about what would have happened if she had been a tenant farmer. But that was a day when private property was still sacred. To ask a person to get off his or her own land seemed very close to treason. If she had uttered so much as one cry for help, she would have been lost. The mob spirit was aroused, and they would have been on her like a pack of wolves. But she owed nobody anything. Everyone with whom she did business made a profit from the business. Even the men who bought the products of her farm merely assembled shipments and sold in larger markets. There was no one who could say he would withhold anything from her and thereby force her to leave. The women were hot for action, but the men could not see a place of beginning. Without expressing the thought, they were also aware of the fact that she never pursued men nor flaunted herself. That would

weigh heavily with men. I don't know whether it would with the women or not. Perhaps it would make them even more angry, since so few women have such power. She did not drink nor did she ever utter vileness. She was quick to laugh at a crude joke if it had any humour, but she told none. In a situation like this I have noticed that men like to move by indirection; they dislike facing the issue squarely, which is exactly what the women want them to do. They were looking for some indirect method, and there was none. Nothing would have saved her if she had owed any money at that time. They would have stripped her bare.

Very little was said about Wickwire, and I never heard of anything being said to him. The men in both instances were regarded as only remotely connected with the affair. A few persons had said Hodge ought to have married Maggie, but no one seemed to think Wickwire ought. In a very short time Wickwire went hunting; but it was his usual time to go hunting, so nothing was thought of it. Shortly after his return, however, he went on another long hunting trip. And I may as well finish with Wickwire here. For the remainder of his life he avoided women, though I think he could have married easily. He spent nearly all of his time hunting or fishing. In his younger days he always had one or more companions on these trips, but thereafter he seldom had a companion. They were as willing as ever to go, but he didn't want them. He neglected his business, and it ceased to grow with the community. Years later it was in the same one-story building, the only one-story building in the block; all the others grew to three stories except the bank on the corner, which was four.

The arrival of Godfrey Wickwire, Junior, seemed to affect Hodge even more than the arrival of his own child. Shortly thereafter he sold his equity in his farm. He reported that he had purchased a much larger and better place in another county. On the day of his departure he brought a span of mules and a good wagon loaded with sacks of oats to Maggie's farm and presented them to her very timidly. He was ashamed to face her. She accepted them quite cordially, just as a girl might say thank you for a box of candy. She seemed to have no particular feeling about the matter, either that he had made amends or made himself ridiculous. I

suspect that if he had cared to stay, she would have renewed the acquaintance just as if nothing had ever happened. I recall asking her if he saw his son. She said he did not. He didn't ask to see his son, and it did not occur to her to present him. Seeing the boy would probably have made Sam suffer. As for Maggie, it did not occur to her that Sam had any interest in the boy. She was proprietor of the children. I think she gave them their father's names partly from lack of inventiveness and partly from shameless frankness. It is indicative of her nature that there was no difficulty about asking her the details of Sam's visit. She told exactly what happened—and without comment. I have often thought that I never knew another person whose testimony equalled hers for accuracy. She never injected an opinion, bias, or prejudice. If the testimony was against herself, it came just as easily as any other part of the narrative. She had one characteristic inaccuracy in giving an account of anything, and that was to leave the women out entirely. She didn't seem to see them. No matter what they did, it made no impression on her mind. If you would lead the witness, however, she would check back to that point and tell you exactly what took place even though it were a recital of a woman's effort to break her spirit and kill her with shame. She would tell the story without feeling. It made no impression on her. She lived in a world of men, where she never had the slightest misgiving about her security.

I saw Maggie only twice in the year following the birth of Godfrey Wickwire, Junior. My responsibilities on the farm were growing heavier, and my interests were widening considerably as I grew into manhood. I was also spending much more time with books and seeking such opportunities as I could find for intellectual companionship. Moreover, I didn't approve of Maggie; but in spite of myself I still liked her in exactly the same way, and that fact caused some turmoil of spirit, which created the first rift in my feeling of closeness to her. I went away for three months to a little five-teacher college. Before I left I slipped over to say good-bye to her. She was the same cheery person. She was greatly interested in my search for learning, but said nothing about my long absence.

On my return, the first news I heard was that Maggie Blake had another baby. Another boy, and his name was Carl Stanton. There was one thing about Maggie's illegitimate children: they had fathers. What their fathers lacked in legality they certainly made up for in definiteness. None ever denied her right to use his name for the child. Stanton was a lawyer, about thirty-five years of age. There was not much business for a lawyer, but he owned a farm and seemed to be comfortable financially. I think Stanton decided he would be more clever than the preceding fathers. He married very shortly after the child was born, but he didn't marry Maggie. I learned afterward that he and the young lady to whom he became engaged about that time had a long talk on the subject of Maggie, and that she forgave him. Unfortunately, however, she was not content with forgiving him once; she continued to forgive him from time to time. Her generosity in this regard became irksome. Stanton was not happy in his home life. Then he adopted another course, which was probably carefully premeditated and approved as subtle strategy: he became a sort of pillar of respectability; he liked to talk to Bible classes or any other assemblage that would listen. And he began wearing a frock coat on formal occasions. He overdid the pose painfully and made himself ridiculous. All the while he was stupid enough to think he was handling his case much better than Hodge or Wickwire had handled theirs. To cap the climax, he ran for office, some petty county office that was usually the reward for personal popularity. As my father expressed it afterward, he didn't get enough votes to wad a shotgun. For the remainder of his life he could be counted on to join any new movement that came along. If a crowd bolted the county Democratic convention, he bolted with them. If someone started a new benevolent or fraternal society, he was the first to join. If there was a Jinks for Governor Club or Bryan for President Club proposed, he immediately gave his whole-hearted support. I do not think I have ever known a more pathetic figure in the life of a community.

In spite of my anger and some disgust, my sympathy went out to Maggie in her new affliction; I waited to see how hard it would go with her this time. Imagine my astonishment, if you can, when I learned that the whole community was

laughing. Maggie was at last beyond the pale even of scandal. Her performances had ceased to be an outrage and were now regarded as a habit. Nowhere did I hear any bitterness; no one suggested a committee. When she appeared in public, people smiled involuntarily and somewhat shyly, as though to say, "I'm trying not to hurt your feelings, but, really, you are so droll." And Maggie joined in their amusement with as much heartiness and as much readiness as she would have joined them in a foot race. She always relished a joke on herself just a little more than a joke on someone else.

I think Maggie had achieved just about what she felt she was honestly entitled to in being regarded as funny. She had always seemed amusing to herself. Whenever any one expressed admiration for her arm or leg, as I did several times in the old days when she and Howard and I were together, she would toss it out with a clumsy gesture and laugh, as much as to say: "Glad you like it, pal. All I've ever noticed is that it's big." I do not recall that she had any vanity. I suppose that was because she had never failed to please, and therefore had not felt it necessary to appraise, assemble, and mobilize her charms.

I went to see Maggie again, and she welcomed me as usual with gingerbread and buttermilk. To her I never grew up. I recall how clean and pretty the house was. The children were well behaved. She still called each boy by his father's full name, and they quite naturally called each other in the same way. She asked a great many questions about the little college, and said she wanted all the boys to go there if I recommended it.

I told her I had seen Hodge working on a farm near the college. He was employed as a labourer, probably at about ten dollars a month. I asked him what became of the money he got for his farm. He merely grunted. He had become more silent and sullen than ever. I think he indulged in a drunken orgy to exhaust the pent-up anguish of self-accusation and spent all his money.

In after years, whenever I came across the statement in print, "The woman always pays," I couldn't help thinking of Maggie and laughing. That doesn't prove that the statement isn't true, but it certainly was not in her case. Maggie

had other love affairs in the years that followed, but no more children. I twitted her about it one day, and she expressed sincere regret that she didn't have any more.

"The only trouble it ever caused me," she said, "was that I couldn't get enough to eat. I used to eat four or five times a day." Any other trouble it had caused her was by that time totally forgotten.

I used to try to find out if she realized what had happened to the fathers of her three illegitimate boys, but she didn't. Hodge's failure was accounted for by the unexplained loss of his money. Wickwire was "too fond of hunting to pay enough attention to his business." The change in Stanton which made him ridiculous she attributed to "fool notions" of his wife. Any one of them could have come to her for help and would have got it.

As we talked that day about Hodge and the little college I kept thinking of the ordeal that awaited those pretty, innocent, babbling children when they should face a public-school playground. I had heard my mother say so often, "What will become of those poor children?" that the thought became very painful to me as I sat among them and heard the music of their baby talk and frequent laughter. I wanted to beg Maggie to send them away; but it would have done no good, so I said nothing. I remembered a little boy whose life was made miserable in school because his father had been sent to the county jail for six months. But Maggie's luck descended to the boys also. Howard Blake, being the eldest, was first to go to school and he, of course, had no bar sinister. He was popular. As the others came on, he had prepared the way for them. They were his devoted admirers and followed him like shadows. I learned that jail was a perfectly understandable disgrace, but illegitimacy was not. Some of the children had been told not to play with the Blake boys, but no reason was given, and the order seemed unjust. The Blake boys had two tremendous assets that parental objection to their society could not overcome. They were good baseball players, and Maggie had the only apple orchard in that part of the state. The Blake boys were a power on any baseball team, and to avoid them was to lock oneself out of that irresistible apple orchard. I suppose it would have been very different if one of the children had been a girl.

Schoolboys are barbarians, but girls are cannibals. That phase of the problem rarely occurred to me, however, because it was scarcely possible to imagine Maggie Blake being the mother of a girl. Her children would inevitably be boys. Even the names of the boys caused no comment. Howard Blake came first; when Sam Hodge appeared, the boys took it for granted his name was Sam Hodge Blake. They always called him Sam Hodge, and I think many of them were under the impression it was one word. Godfrey Wickwire was an impossible name, and he became "Bunny" even before schooldays. Carl Stanton was called by his full name, but the words were run together as Sam Hodge had always been. The boys inherited Maggie's indifference to education. None went to the little college I had recommended.

During the Blake boys' schooldays other children were tortured because they had red hair or big freckles or queer clothes or because of some unfavourable publicity touching their parents; but the Blake boys never were. I happen to know that several children were spanked for being friendly with them, but the punishment failed of its purpose. The lure of baseball, apples, gingerbread, and good company was too strong. The boys who were whipped suppressed the news and failed to mend their ways.

Maggie still liked to go to the dances and fairs or any other public entertainment where she did not feel that she was intruding. She would frequently be accompanied home by from six to ten young men. As her sons grew to young manhood, they seemed to take the same delight in her company. None of the boys moved away. Farms were growing smaller by the time they were ready to marry, so she gave each a piece of land to settle on. Every one of her boys married in that community. I cannot properly say that they amounted to a great deal, but as that community judged success, they had a very fair measure of it.

They knew their fathers, but didn't pay much attention to them. I don't think the information interested them a great deal more than it interested Maggie herself. They had a full share of her indifference to social conventions. I choose the word indifference with care, because it was not contempt.

The town began to grow very rapidly when Howard Blake, Junior, was about twenty-one years old. Maggie would

talk enthusiastically on that subject, and several times told me that it was about the best community in the world and certainly deserved to grow.

The many new families coming both to farm and town offered to establish neighbourly relations with Maggie, and she always extended the delightful hospitality of her home. Some weeks or months later the newcomers would hear Maggie's life story. They didn't believe it. Having been taught all their lives what sort of women did such things, they could see for themselves that Maggie was not that sort. Bluff and hearty she was, to be sure, but not immoral. Well, they were right, in a way. Maggie wasn't immoral; she was unmoral.

The time came when there were more new settlers than old residents. Whenever I was asked about the story, I said I didn't know, until one day I heard my father reply to the same question, "She was a good neighbour for more than twenty years." That struck me as much better, so I adopted it. I suppose many others side-stepped in the same way. At any rate, the story of Maggie simply fell down. There were more people who didn't believe it than did.

One of the strangest phases of the controversy about Maggie (it was waged for some three years between the newcomers who liked her and the older residents who felt she should be ostracized) was that none of the newcomers ever asked her directly to explain her children's names, and none of the older residents was clever enough to prove his or her story by Maggie's own testimony. She would not have denied it. Neither would any of the boys; but they were not asked, even after her death.

I have never known of another case in which Bacon's comment on death was so strikingly proved true. It was he who said, "Death closeth the door to envy and is a passport to good fame."

There was a little creek which ran through our pasture and Maggie's. Usually it was about ten feet wide, but sometimes it disappeared. After a heavy rain it became a torrent fifty yards wide and tore down fences. There was a cloudburst in the hills upstream the year Carl Stanton was married. He was then twenty years of age. As the country became more thickly settled, people had encroached on the bed of

this innocent-looking stream. After the cloudburst it became half a mile wide in some places. Houses, barns, wagons, and fences were tumbling along its boiling waters, together with pigs, goats, sheep, horses, and cows. This strange and fearful procession was moving through Maggie's pasture at an astonishing speed when she saw a little boy about six years old clinging to the top of what remained of his home. Maggie waded into the water at once. Those who saw her said she was swept away before she had reached a depth of four feet. She and the child were both drowned. Their bodies were washed ashore together at a bend in the creek in our pasture.

Having accepted their mother's ostracism all their lives, the boys prepared for a funeral at which they would be the only mourners. But the procession to the cemetery was more than a mile long. It was now absolutely safe for the first time to make public confession of that love for Maggie which all felt and which had tortured them through all the years when they bowed to their duty to hate her. There was something inexpressibly pathetic in the fact that Maggie had done the community such a signal service by her death. At last a burden was lifted from their hearts. They could henceforth claim her memory as they had never been able to claim her. It was now perfectly clear that she had caused them much more anguish than they had ever caused her.

For a long time I had wanted to find out exactly how the boys estimated their mother, aside from the fact that they loved her devotedly. It was some months after the funeral that I had an opportunity to talk with Howard Blake for a whole afternoon.

"Mother was elemental, like the weather or the moon," he said. "I never judged her at all. Whatever she did was inevitable, without plan or design. You couldn't quarrel with her ideas, because she was not conscious of having a philosophy of life. Yet she had as definite a philosophy as the world has ever known. Her utter lack of self-consciousness was her strength. All her life she gave and never asked anything. We boys loved her for the same reason and in very much the same way that you did. She won our love as honestly as any stranger might. She never claimed it as a

mother's due. She took it by the very simple method of giving us her love so abundantly."

I have since known many famous women, good, bad, powerful, wise, or brilliant, but she remains the most remarkable personality I have ever encountered. I doubt if she had either education or imagination enough to enjoy a dime novel. I am not certain that she knew long division. But this I do know of her: she was incapable of envy, malice, or revenge. Her sublime faith in men was never diminished. I do not believe she was ever worried, even for a minute. The only unfulfilled wish I ever heard her express was for more babies. Such a person would quite naturally be able to perform miracles, and Maggie certainly performed one. She practised something akin to polyandry in a strictly orthodox, puritanical, farming community for more than a decade, named three illegitimate sons after their fathers, wrecked all three of the fathers, flourished as probably no green bay tree ever dreamed of flourishing, and finally in her mature years chased those who wanted to tell the truth about her to evasion, silence, or actual falsehood.

RACHEL AND HER CHILDREN

By FRANCES NEWMAN.

From American Mercury

EVERYONE agreed that a perfect stranger could not have seen Mrs. Foster's funeral without realizing that Mrs. Foster had lived a well-rounded life. There was her husband in the front pew, vainly struggling to conceal his grief so that he could console Mrs. Foster's mother, old Mrs. Overton. There were her two sons, vainly struggling to conceal their grief so that they could console Mrs. Foster's daughters-in-law, their wives. There were her four little grandchildren, as downcast as any one could ask. There were her six faithful servants, as heartbroken as her daughters-in-law. The society of Colonial Dames was there, in a body, and the Daughters of the Confederacy were there in a body. The Woman's Club was there, in a body, and even the Chamber of Commerce was there, in a body. There was all of the Social Register which did not happen to be on its yachts, or in sanatoria, or abroad. And there were the wreaths, and the harps, and the crescents, and the sheaves of all those bodies and of all those personages.

The hearts of the community went out to every member of Mrs. Foster's stricken family, so the rector told his audience and his God. But in particular it went out to Mrs. Foster's mother, for not a month before she had stood by her only son's open grave, and now she was about to stand beside her only daughter's open grave. She sat among them in the church—as the rector said, like Rachel weeping for her children. But she was veiled in English crêpe of excellent quality and so the most acute eyes of the community could not count the number of her tears. It was fortunate, indeed, that Mr. Foster could afford that excellent quality of crêpe,

for old Mrs. Overton was not actually weeping like Rachel—in fact, she was not weeping at all.

Old Mrs. Overton had dreamed indirectly of Mrs. Foster's funeral on at least a hundred different nights. Thus she had now no difficulty in realizing that her brilliant daughter's mortal remains were reposing in that gray coffin which was so magnificently concealed by its blanket of lilies and pink roses. Old Mrs. Overton was seventy-four years old; she belonged to a generation which believed that dreaming of a funeral was a sign of a wedding, and that dreaming of a wedding was a sign of a funeral. She had never read the works of Dr. Siegmund Freud—she had, in fact, never heard of Dr. Freud—and so she had no idea what Dr. Freud's disciples would have entered on the card describing her case. Old Mrs. Overton sat comfortably in the best corner of the cushioned pew and, in the pleasant shelter of her well-draped veil, thought about things.

She thought of the time when she was sixteen, back in 1864. She thought of Captain Ashby, with his black plume and his black horse. They had stood in the box garden, and she had fairly ached with adoration of his six feet, his black hair, his black eyes, of the wound in some vaguely invisible spot that no Southern lady could even think about, of his gallant war record, not yet embalmed in the Confederate Museum. She was familiar with the works of Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray and Sir Walter Scott, but she had never been allowed to read the story of Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester. She flutteringly expected . . . she flutteringly hoped . . . that one night soon, perhaps that very night, Captain Ashby would drop on his gray-trousered knees, and implore her to do him the great honour of becoming his wife. She would accept the great honour, she would beg him not to kneel before one so unworthy, and Captain Ashby would rise. He would timidly bend down and kiss her respectfully on the forehead. And then Captain Ashby and his betrothed would walk in to his betrothed's father, and Captain Ashby would ask her hand in marriage. That was what Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray led one to expect, and that was what her mother, who had been twice married and therefore twice engaged, led her to expect.

But that was not what happened. Captain Ashby stopped

talking. Even eager questions about his recent heroic deeds were barely answered. The moment might be approaching. Sally had no desire to postpone it, and so she stopped asking the eager questions. Captain Ashby seized her in a passionate embrace, he covered her face with passionate kisses, he kissed her under her soft chin, and just below the brown curls on her neck. It was instantly obvious to Sally that Captain Ashby did not love her. *Ivanhoe* would never have kissed the fair Rowena like that; *David Copperfield* would never have kissed the angelic Agnes like that, or even Dora who could not keep her accounts straight. Sally's heart was broken. She tore herself from the embrace of this man who had proved that he did not love her by kissing her, she rushed into her father's house, and up the stairs to her own four-poster. She wept there until her mother came to find her, and to hear the tragic tale. And her mother, though she had been twice married and twice engaged, confirmed Sally's belief that she had been insulted. And Captain Ashby rode away on his black horse.

Mrs. Overton sighed a little under the *crêpe veil*. She had waited six months for the black horse to gallop back up the avenue between the magnolias, but it had been years before she discovered that a kiss before proposal did not necessarily insult a great love. Meanwhile, her mother had decided to marry her to a certain Colonel Overton, and had had no great difficulty in overcoming Colonel Overton's intention of being legally faithful to the memory of his Julia. Sally's heart, of course, was broken, but that was no reason for being a forlorn old maid, and she thought it would be rather pleasant to decide for herself what frock she would wear, and whether she would go to the Springs in the summer, and how she would do her hair. Elderly husbands were said to be tractable, and Sally had been very tired of talking only when Mama didn't want to talk, or only to people Mama didn't want to talk to, and of always sitting with her back to the horses like an inconsequential Prince Consort. She had been convinced that the dignity of marriage would offset its disadvantages, and, besides, she had no very clear idea of marriage except that it meant a change of name and of residence, and sitting at the head of one's own table, behind one's own silver tea service. People hardly talked then of the boredom

of sitting at the other end of the table from the wrong man every morning; certainly they never talked of the occasions when there wasn't a table between one and the wrong man.

The choir was singing "Lead, Kindly Light," which had been Mrs. Foster's favourite hymn, and which, she always mentioned, was written by the late Cardinal Newman before he became a Catholic, much less a Cardinal. Old Mrs. Overton shivered a little under her veil when they came to

And with the morn those angel faces smile
That I have loved long since and lost awhile.

Mrs. Overton had no doubt that Mama, tulle cap, black bombazine, and all, and Colonel Overton, beard, temper, and all, would be smiling among those angels, and the idea was not cheering. She had been an old man's darling, but she had also been an old man's slave, a carefully treasured harem of one. Colonel Overton had been fond of saying, of declaiming, that he did not believe in the honour of any man, or the virtue of any woman. Sally had never thought of deceiving him even about the price of a new gown, but even if she had been the most abandoned creature she would have been saved in spite of herself. When she went to a dentist, Colonel Overton was beside her. When she bought a new hat, Colonel Overton was there to protect her from the shop's manager and also from an unbecoming bonnet. Sally had never danced even the Virginia Reel or the Lancers after the morning when Colonel Overton had confirmed her idea of respectful proposals by asking the honour of her hand in marriage and then kissing her chastely on the brow.

Now she looked at the lilies and pink roses that concealed Mrs. Foster's coffin under their expensive fragrance. She was thinking of the day Mrs. Foster was born—something less than a year after the respectful proposal. It was not a coincidence that the baby, now a corpse, had been christened Cornelia for the maternal grandmother whose capacity for being obeyed she had inherited. Mrs. Overton's mother had not waited to receive a namesake with that pleased surprise which ordinarily greets namesakes and proposals and legacies. She had taken the name for granted, quite audibly,

on the day when a granddaughter's probable advent was announced to her. The younger Cornelia had justified her grandmother. She allowed her mother to sit in her own carriage facing her own horses, and she allowed her to continue filling her own cups with tea and coffee from her own silver urn. That was the correct thing, and Cornelia always did the correct thing, in all matters from sleeves and shoes to husbands and religions. But after Cornelia was four years old, her mother was never allowed to talk to the people she wanted to talk to about the things she wanted to talk about—not even when her husband permitted her the luxury of an unchaperoned feminine visit. And when Colonel Overton very unwillingly died, Cornelia had seen that her mother was faithful to his memory.

Cornelia was nineteen when that event took place, and just in the process of marrying herself to a rising young lawyer named Henry Foster. The marriage took place shortly afterward, with a simple elegance which the newspaper notices attributed to the recent bereavement in the bride's family. But the simplicity of the elegance at Cornelia's marriage was really due to the disappearance of the late colonel's prosperity rather than to the disappearance of the late colonel himself. His wife and his daughter and his son knew that their acquaintances attributed part of this disappearance to the colonel's extraordinary gratitude to a prepossessing coloured—just barely coloured—nurse, who had been the comfort of his declining years. But Mrs. Overton had never been so indiscreet as to mention this theory to her daughter, even on the most tempting occasions.

Mrs. Overton had been as faithful to her husband as her sex required in the days when a good woman had no history except that recorded in the parish register. Her husband, she supposed, had been no more faithful to her than his sex will continue to require until nature changes her ways. But her daughter was inexpressibly shocked when she began to show signs of considering a second alliance.

Mrs. Overton, at that time, was still sufficiently under forty not to have begun comparing the corners of her eyes and the line under her chin with those of her contemporaries. The aspiring Mr. Robinson was not an Overton, but the war had

been over long enough for prosperous Robinsons and impoverished Overtons to marry each other without scandal. Mrs. Overton would have liked to sit behind her own silver tea service again, and in her own drawing room, and Mr. Robinson would have been so honoured by the gift of her hand in marriage that she would at last have been able to talk to the people she wanted to talk to about the things she wanted to talk about. But Cornelia disapproved of second marriages so positively that people who did not know her might well have thought she was sorry that she had been born. Cornelia was then expecting the birth of that son who was now trying to conceal his own grief so that he could console her first daughter-in-law. And Cornelia had been thrown into such a state by her mother's announcement that Mrs. Overton had felt obliged to give up the idea.

So she had continued to sit on the side of her daughter's table for nine months of every year, and on the side of her son William's table for three months of every year. Even when tea services on breakfast tables went out, and round tables came in, tables continued to have a head and a side, and Mrs. Overton had continued to grieve for her own tea service and her own table. She had never ceased to long for a house where a ringing telephone would mean that someone in the world wanted to talk with her badly enough to go through the trouble of getting a telephone number; where a ringing door bell would mean that someone wanted to see her, if it were only a book agent, or the laundry man.

For thirty-four years Mrs. Overton had spoken to Daughters of the American Revolution and Daughters of the Confederacy and newspaper reporters and officers of those clubs which seem to exist chiefly to elect officers. But she had spoken only to tell them that Mrs. Foster was lunching or dining or presiding at some house or some club where she either could or could not be called to the telephone. She had talked to a great many callers, but she had talked to callers of no consequence, while Mrs. Foster talked to callers of great consequence—local, if not international. And then Mrs. Foster had fallen ill. And William Overton had fallen ill. And old Mrs. Overton began to be Rachel weeping for her children.

Mrs. Foster was ill, desperately ill, for six months. For

their convenience, if not for hers, the doctors decreed that Mrs. Foster must be in a hospital, and that she must receive no visitors. Old Mrs. Overton suffered with her daughter, but she revived the pleasant old custom of pouring the breakfast coffee from her own silver urn, and Mr. Foster was delighted. She carried the pantry keys, and the silver-closet keys, and the linen-room keys; she went to market alone; she went shopping alone. All the ladies of high position, and all the officers of all Mrs. Foster's clubs came to call on Mrs. Overton—to ask about Mrs. Foster, of course, but even on such occasions other subjects are discussed, and Mrs. Overton must be cheered and strengthened for the ordeal she was undergoing. Then William Overton was mercifully released from his sufferings. And then Mrs. Foster was mercifully released from her longer sufferings.

Old Mrs. Overton had received hundreds of notes. She had scores of callers, and she had felt herself able to receive them all—decorously, in her own bedroom, one or two at a time. Her fortitude was considered remarkable. She had ordered delicate lunches for the faithful friends who were downstairs receiving the wreaths and the sheaves of Mrs. Overton's other friends and of all her societies. And she had ordered her own veil of the best English crêpe.

The choir was singing "Asleep in Jesus," and Mrs. Foster's funeral was nearly over. Mrs. Overton began to look about a little, under the shadow of her veil. She was thinking of all the visitors she would have the next day and the next week; of the days the granddaughters-in-law and the great-grandchildren would spend with her, of the birthday party she would give for little Cornelia in the spring—Mrs. Foster would want her namesake to have the party she had promised her. She was thinking of all the people who would beg her and Mr. Foster to come and have dinner with them, very quietly—since they, too, had loved Mrs. Foster.

And then Mrs. Overton happened to look across the aisle at Mrs. Turner, and Mrs. Turner was looking beyond her at Mr. Foster. Mrs. Turner's look was only a decorous look of heartfelt sympathy, but Mrs. Overton suddenly felt cold and forlorn. She remembered how attentive Mrs. Turner had been to her and to Mr. Foster. And she remembered that

Mrs. Turner had lost Mr. Turner three years before. And she remembered how many of the kind women who had come to cheer her for her great ordeal, who had received the flowers that were banked about the chancel, had lost their husbands three or four or five years before. She remembered the statistics of the number of widows in the state that she had read for one of Mrs. Foster's erudite club papers. The whole church, the whole world, seemed to be filled with widows—widows whose daughters would not discourage their mothers from taking names different from their own.

Mrs. Overton had no doubt that in a year she would go back to the side of another Mrs. Foster's table, that she would receive telephone messages for another Mrs. Foster—and that this Mrs. Foster would not even be her daughter.

The last prayer was over. The eight eminent pallbearers were gathering. Mr. Foster rose and offered his arm to his mother-in-law. Mrs. Overton stood up, shaking with bitter sobs, and took the offered arm. She walked up the aisle behind the blanket of lilies and pink roses that covered Mrs. Foster's coffin. All the hearts of the community went out to old Mrs. Overton, weeping like Rachel for her children.

URIAH'S SON

By STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

From *Red Book*

CERTAIN stories have a way of repeating themselves: the transfer of Naboth's vineyard turns up in the real-estate columns; the steel-and-concrete walls of a modern Jericho crumble at the blast of the strong man's trumpet; a businesslike Jacob in a battered derby tricks a hungry Esau into signing away his rightful inheritance on the dotted line. Life may have more possible permutations than a hand of cards, but certain combinations recur—only sometimes the sleight of circumstance provides a new and unexpected ending to an ancient gambit. It was so with David Davenant and Frances Jerome.

David, king over Israel, was a strong, cunning, diverse man. So was David Davenant—and a little king in the New York of his day, as well. As for Frances—no, the sumptuous beauty of Bathsheba, pale and burning, was hardly hers, though she *was* beautiful. She was kind, forgiving, and gentle, with cool hands and a delicate gaiety when she was pleased—the kind of woman life seems to delight in forcing into traps that would break the strong.

Everybody expected her to marry badly—for she had what people considered a terrible weakness for taking care of crippled things. So everybody was disappointed—most favourably, of course—when she married Dicky Jerome.

Dicky was your fortunate youth, *par excellence*—you know the school legend—the life of the party, the man who can arrive as late as he pleases, anywhere, and always be more than forgiven. He was handsome in his youth, without a trace of slickness—the pleasantest of company—dogs adored him—success came rubbing against his legs like an affectionate cat. Life had no corners for him, as it had for David

Davenant. Why he ever picked out Frances—but he *did*, to the temporary discomfiture of the prophets, who had to fall back upon the comment that poor Frances sometimes seemed a little dazed with her own good fortune. They had been married three years, and had a son who looked absurdly like Dicky from the first—that Dicky's first child should be a son was as much to be expected as that it should be spoken of as Dicky's son—and everybody knew how well Dicky was doing with D. Davenant and Co.—when David Davenant came to the Jeromes' for dinner one night.

His coming was not quite as much of an individual triumph for Dicky's luck as it sounds. After all—David Davenant had known Frances' father—and David was famous for keeping rather uncanny track of the private affairs of his brilliant young men. But for all that, Frances must have been rather excited about that evening. As for Dicky, who never was nervous—the evening must have made him believe more firmly than ever in his peculiar star.

You can see Frances, shy and anxious—a gentle kitten being modestly polite to a king, whenever opportunity offered, which was seldom, for Dicky carried the brunt of the conversation with his usual aplomb. And David—looking at Frances—and looking again!

What could it have been in Frances that stirred such intense and ruthless purpose in the heart of a dour, self-sufficient man some twenty years older than herself? A gaunt lion, staring enchanted at a spray of spring cherry blossoms—a cold king, stung to the soul by beauty demure as a child's, unconscious as a child's. But it happened—and Frances, I think, did not even know it was happening, in spite of what people said later. The king came to dinner oftener—the other brilliant young men began to watch Dicky with wary eyes. One wonders if David of Israel ever went to dinner at the Uriahs'—and if the captains of his host were envious and said that Uriah had all the luck.

Modern kings manage these affairs a little less crudely, perhaps, than their forbears did. The blue envelope has supplanted the executioner's sword. So David did not set Dicky in the forefront of the battle and bid his companions retire from him that he might die. Instead he raised Dicky's salary and sent him on a trip of investigation to Cholopan.

White women with young children do not go to Cholopan if they want to live—or did not, then; and even the strictest living of white men used to come back shaken. As for the other white men, they did not last long. Dicky did not last long.

A year and a half after his death, Frances married David Davenant. Then the whispers began. The kindest said that he must have terrified her into it, and told tales of the implacable, bearish strength that had always got him the thing he desired. Or else, that of course it was for the child, poor thing, and they pitied her. Indeed, Dicky's death had left her in actual poverty; it is really astonishing how much it costs for even the most fortunate of pleasant young men to maintain a home in a properly agreeable way. As for what the more malicious agreed about the whole affair—but why bother with them? The one point on which all were agreed was that Frances certainly had no right to seem at all happy in her second marriage. And she did seem—not unhappy, at least—at first.

David must have reckoned that a king could crush such gossip like a snapping little animal under his heel, by mere strength. But gossip is fog that comes seeping in through the tiny cracks of existence—seeping in and in, no matter how firmly one tries to stuff the cracks.

As it was, he broke one twenty-year friendship in the first months of his marriage—when Rufus Malone, who feared neither God nor David, greeted him one day with: “Well, David—and how is the fair Bathsheba to-day?” David turned on his heel and never spoke to the man again. The incident made more gossip—and after that, David may have thought, with some wisdom, that the best thing to do was to wait and let the gossip wear out with time. But Frances wore out first.

She died four years after her second marriage—taking leave of life as gently and civilly as she had always taken leave of her friends. And the friends who had thought her first apparent happiness unseemly were satisfied, for when she died, she had certainly not been what the world calls happy for a long time. The gossip had reached her and touched her—and some natures cannot endure a lifelong warfare with fog. Toward the last, I think, she lived wholly for her boy—but

she must have trusted David, or she could not have borne it to leave the boy alone with him. He was seven or so when she died—a handsome, charming child, a little delicate, with his father's graces of manner.

So Frances' story ended—and the prophets of her world were satisfied—for their prophecies had been fulfilled at last.

As for David, who had grimly adored her and loaded her docile fragility with gifts so properly kingly, they weighed her down like golden armour—no one knew if or what he suffered, or with what private agony of iron tears he tried to buy off Death. Kings have no time for long grief, and he went on—only something seemed to shut up in his mind with a click of steel. If he had been grim before, he was grimmer now—the rare, odd, awkward tenderness he had sometimes shown with Frances, the strange occasional attempts at light-heartedness, as at the playing of an unaccustomed game—these disappeared. His hair whitened; he grew leaner—but his mind retained the relentless precision of a strong machine—and D. Davenant and Co. prospered till few competitors dared stand in its shadow.

After a while men began to say jokingly that he would never die—unless, they added, half-believing it, the Devil flew away with him. For even after Frances' death, he displayed no slightest sign of repentance for what he had done—though, by now, his story, and Frances', and Dicky Jerome's, had well nigh taken on the proportions of a legend—and people called him "King David," under their breath.

Then, as the boy grew up, there began to be talk about "King David" and "Uriah's son."

Frank Jerome's first real memory of his stepfather was one of fear. A gaunt figure stalking about the tiny apartment where Frances had gone to live after Dicky's death—a figure so tall and strange and with such a frightening air of power about it that Frank always felt that he and his mother and the apartment lived only on sufferance in its presence—that, if it wished, it could stamp with its foot like a lanky master magician and crumple the neat little rooms to pieces like a house of cards. A gaunt face coming close to him, the eyes staring at him unblinkingly, seeming to count and judge every childish mistake without mercy or comprehension—knotty, powerful hands, bestowing mysterious parcels of toys that

were wonderful enough in themselves, but took a long time to get used to, because they, too, had an air of power and condescension from which he shrank.

Then the house on Riverside Drive—vast and gloomy, dark curtains, soft funereal carpets—and the first terrors of finding the gaunt figure unexpectedly there, at meals, following his mother about like a tall, overpowering shadow, asking penetrating questions for which there were no right answers, horrifically seated, smoking a gaunt cigar in rooms that had begun to seem a little familiar—everywhere!

The child can really have seen very little of David those first years—but the presence of him obsessed his days. And when he was told about God, he made Him in David's image—a gaunt figure in white robes, spiky-crowned, appallingly just and omnipresent, striding the floors of heaven with a pitiless eye alert.

Then the memories grew brighter and clearer—his mother's death, the numb, uncomprehending shock, the gaunt figure with its face set and rigid, saying, "Frances! Frances!" in a harsh, dull voice—his mother, smiling tinily: "Take care of your father, Frank!" But David wasn't his father—and as for taking care of him—Frank would as soon have thought of trying to take care of God.

A strange life, after that, for the two of them in the huge, melancholy house. Nurses and governesses—the servants—days and weeks when David hardly seemed to see the little boy who played in the corner. Did David hate him, or was it merely with bleak indifference that the deep eyes regarded him and his games? He didn't know. But he began to think that David hated him, after the incident of the closet under the stairs.

Frank hated the stairs and the black and cavernous hall. Sinister shadows lurked there in the long, gray winter afternoons—dark, faceless shapes of shadow, ready to catch at a little boy's feet. And the closet under the stairs was their most secret fastness.

Perhaps David noticed this aversion of Frank's, with those bleak eyes that seemed to see nothing and everything. At any rate, one afternoon, when they were alone, he spoke: "Frank."

"Yes, sir."

"I left a box of cigars in the closet under the stairs. Go and get it for me, please."

The request left Frank aghast. Why, even the lights in the hall were not on yet—not that they helped much! The hall was packed with shadows.

"Well, Frank? What's the matter?"

"N-nothing."

"What's the matter?"

"C-can't I ask Miss Tyler? I——"

"Frank, are you afraid? Afraid of the dark?" The gaunt face stiffened—the last words were a delicate lash of scorn.

"Y-yes!"—defiantly.

The set visage relaxed a trifle. "Why? There's nothing to be afraid of. Nothing will hurt you."

But he didn't know. How could he know? Even the shadows would be afraid of *him*.

"Frank, go and get that box."

Slowly, rebelliously, Frank turned to face the shadows. There were even more of them than he had feared. But he could feel David's eyes on his back, burning. He caught his breath and walked straight into the heart of the darkness.

"On the second shelf, Frank."

He wanted to grab with icy hands and run back, but he could not. If he did he would be ashamed in the sight of those hateful eyes. He found the box, and turned, trembling, to face the terrible shadows again. Why—they were only shadows! Just ordinary shadows! He gasped with astonishment—and walked back slowly—even dallying a little, in fearful defiance.

After that, he could not afford to be afraid of the closet, for he never knew when David might send him there again. But at times he felt quite sure that David had hated him, and had been disappointed that he had not failed in the cruel adventure. That, more than anything else, helped him to conquer his fear. And then he felt more certain than ever that David hated him, for a month or so after the incident, David suddenly informed him that he was to be sent away to school.

He didn't want to go to school—it meant discomfort, change, a whole host of possible terrors. But being his father's son, when he got to school, he prospered—he had

that indefinable engagingness that, in man or woman, makes the run of mankind follow the proverb and give to him that hath. He had his father's facility—his father's ease. And his school and college life could easily have been like his father's, a pleasant, triumphal passage through an admiring throng. But it was not—because of David.

David did not fit in at all with the admiring throng. Indeed, he seemed often to grudge what success his stepson had, and certainly never praised him. Coming back to David, on vacations, was like stepping from a warm room under the freezing needles of a shower-bath. After a while Frank learned to brace and inure himself against that shock. The fact that David certainly disliked him, very possibly hated him, became merely a fact—a weight to carry, but not a crushing weight, for, oddly enough, Frank could never find the flicker of meanness or spite in those deep and hostile eyes. He knew what some of his friends thought of David's attitude but he could not agree with them. The hate that was set against him was a superb hate. It had an iron quality. He strove against it as against a bar of iron—and grew strong.

David gave him a ridiculously tiny allowance, considering, but he lived within it rigidly, contracting none of the pleasant debts of some of his classmates. He would not give David the opportunity for easy scorn such debts might afford. He played football for four years on the scrub team, knowing perfectly well that he had no chance for a letter—but he would not give up the game and hear David's voice: "So you've given up football, Frank?" and see the thought in his mind: "I thought you couldn't stick it out."

It must not be understood that his youth was either doleful or priggishly self-centred—it was not. He enjoyed himself greatly and was well liked; but under the surface of his days lay a certain backbone of purpose, rare among his fellows. When he was graduated, he received no votes for "most popular man," but he had, without knowing it, the respect of his entire class.

The war came when he was twenty-one, in his last year of college. David wrote a characteristic letter. "So you intend to enlist in the Marines. Considering your training, and the scarcity of officer material, you would probably be rather more useful if you tried for an officers' training camp

—but I realize that the job for which a man is best suited is seldom the one that appeals to him. Besides, as a private, you would have much less responsibility—which is always pleasanter.” The unit Frank had intended to join went overseas without him. He went to camp and spent his war service training recruits in Texas. But the recruits were well trained—even David would have admitted that.

After the war he came back to the house on Riverside Drive, and David frigidly offered him a chance with D. Davenant and Co. “You realize that, though the other men may not think so at first, you will be treated exactly like any other employee. Your success, should you make it, you will have to make yourself. I have never played favourites.”

Frank smiled. “Of course, sir.” At last they were coming to grips.

“In fact,” said David, doubtfully, “—don’t grin at me, Frank!—it will probably be a little harder for you than the ordinary man. Your superiors will be informed that you need expect no private favours from me——”

“Very well, sir.”

“Very well. You will report at the office in the morning. I shall, naturally, discontinue your allowance, but you may live here if you prefer it.”

“I’ll pay you rent.”

“Don’t be nonsensical,” said David, contemptuously.

“Then I’ll live somewhere else.”

A gleam lighted David’s eyes.

“As you please. However, in that case—if you wish to stay here—you may pay me the average rent my clerks pay.” He named figures.

“Very well.”

Frank had been working six months when he made the discovery. Gossip sleeps—but it does not die. He overheard the office whispers behind his back—the whispers that called him Uriah’s son. So he came to know, at last.

When he was quite sure, and the first bitterness was still upon him, he went to David. It was after a dinner as silent as most of their meals together. The interview took place in the vast, funereal room whence David had sent him out that time to look for the cigar box in the closet under the stairs. David had just lighted one of that same brand of cigars.

"I want to talk to you, sir."

"Well, Frank? Getting tired of the grind?"

"No. I want to ask you some things about my father."

The knotty fingers of David's hand clenched suddenly about his cigar. Then, gradually, they unclosed. "I've spoiled my cigar," he said, in a musing voice. He took another cigar from the box, clipped, lighted it. Then he turned to Frank.

"So? Well?"

Frank told him what he had heard. As David failed to reply, sitting stiff in his chair, the accusing voice grew more passionate. There was nothing young about that voice any longer—the heat in it was the heat of a deep, steady flame, too white-hot to sputter or roar.

When Frank was quite done, the composed figure stirred a little.

"Well? Is that all?"

"You don't deny it?"

"No," said the quiet image, "I don't deny it."

Frank passed his hand over his forehead with an odd, mechanical gesture. He had expected raging denial—mountainous anger—lies that stuck in the throat—anything but this quietude. He could hardly believe his own accusation, even now. There had been hate between them before—strong hate—but nothing like this, nothing crawling. He looked at David as a child might look at a monster. A sudden horror seized him—a horror that, if he looked long enough, he might see blood upon David's hands—and he shook.

"You don't deny it?" he repeated, stupidly.

"No," came the quiet answer again. "I don't deny it. Your father was worthless and useless——"

"You liar! Oh, I've heard! He was——"

"Worthless and useless. He crossed me—I put him out of my way. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to kill you, I think," said Frank; and he believed it—then.

"Well," said the figure, with a certain horrible mockery, "as you will. I've lived a long time."

The hands that were almost at David's throat dropped away.

"No," said Frank, in a cracking voice, "that wouldn't be enough. I'd rather have everybody know what you are—and they will. I'll put you in jail for my father's murder, if it takes me——"

"It would be like your father's son," said David, "to dirty your mother's memory—if he could."

"You devil!" said Frank, half sobbing. He pressed his hands against his eyes.

David carefully extinguished his cigar.

"If you are quite through——" he said.

"No," said Frank, and this time the eyes that looked into David's eyes were calm as his own. "I can't kill you—I can't disgrace you—but I *can* break you. You don't care about God or death or disgrace—but you care about D. Davenant and Company! And I'll break D. Davenant and Company! I think that would hurt you more than anything else."

"Try it," said David Davenant, and rose to his feet. He laughed. "If you were *my* son—perhaps. But not the son of your father. He was worthless and useless—and you are too much like him. It would take a strong man to break me, Frank—not you."

"You lie," said Frank, steadily. "You were afraid of my father. You murdered him because you were afraid. You could because he trusted you. But I know you—and you sha'n't murder me—and I'll break you."

"Try it," said David Davenant again, and walked out of the room.

Hot resolutions cool between night and morning, as a rule. The next morning Frank's resolution had not cooled, but he began to realize the enormous difficulty of his task.

He realized it even more in the next few months. But when a man is willing to work twenty-four hours a day for a purpose, and subordinate everything else in life to that purpose, he either breaks himself or accomplishes his task.

The first step took him two hard and discouraging years. But the time had long been ripe in the trade for an organized fight of the independents against D. Davenant and Company, and Frank found himself at last a small but growingly important figure in the forces preparing for that fight.

Luck helped him somewhat, but not more than it generally helps the man who bullies rather than beseeches it. And the fires of his purpose never had time to grow cold, for whenever they sank down a little, his path and David's would cross. After a time he began to suspect that David, in his kingly way, was keeping very close track of him, and the suspicion tightened his grip on his weapons. David was watching for a slip—he must make no slips.

There was the incident of Mrs. Dixon, for instance. Mrs. Dixon was, to the eye, merely a comely, rather flirtatious young widow with a certain quite pleasant foolishness about her. Frank liked her. They told stories about her, of course—and some not very nice ones; but they told stories about everyone. She had never been actually touched by scandal; and if she lived rather expensively and maintained a discreet silence about the presumably defunct Mr. Dixon—that was her own affair.

Frank's friendship with her was progressing very pleasantly when, one evening as they were dining together in a restaurant whose reputation leaned toward the indiscreet, David came in, alone, and sat down at the table opposite them.

It spoiled an agreeable dinner party; Mrs. Dixon's sallies began to seem vapid or a little too eager. Frank kept looking at David, who did not seem to observe him. But Frank knew he did. He could hear David's voice—"like your father—worthless—useless——" Frank and David exchanged no words, but the dinner ended in unacknowledged discord. Nor did Frank accept Mrs. Dixon's carefully casual invitation to stop in at her apartment for a last cigarette before he went home. After that, their friendship lapsed, in spite of Mrs. Dixon's letters. When the Harcourt scandal broke next year, Frank was just as glad that he had not answered those letters. If David had not come that evening—David might have triumphed. So David's wariness had done him a bad turn, for once. But that wariness kept on.

There were other incidents like that of Mrs. Dixon—other unexpected meetings with David in the flesh, a dour figure watching with terrible persistence for Frank to stumble and fall. And David in the spirit was always watching. "Just like your father," the phantom said—and Frank buckled to

and disproved him—or rather proved him wrong in a different way—for it came to seem to him as if every mistake he made counted doubly, against himself, and against his father in his grave. So the pitfalls that lie in wait for the fool and the rogue were evaded—and every day they were evaded brought Frank nearer to his goal.

Sometimes he had the fear that David might die before he was able to break him—but David seemed as unchanging and perdurable as his hate. And then, in the beginning of the fourth year of his purpose, Frank fell in love with Shirley Free.

He was lucky—Shirleys are infrequent. She was everything he had wanted rather dumbly and never had. They were very happy. But he did not tell her the whole of his purpose, for he knew her to be forgiving. Perhaps it was as well; for, abruptly, the invisible persecution tightened its net, and David appeared anew.

A glimpse of David, passing them in an automobile as Shirley and he were walking a country road; on another occasion looking out of the window and seeing a gaunt observant figure on the other side of the street—an ominous coincidence, too often repeated to be accidental.

The wedding was to be in October. The plans of the independents were coming to a head—and only the certainty of Shirley and Shirley's devotion kept Frank up through the straining summer months. As it was, he grew nervous and edgy—and David walked through his dreams.

When Frank discovered, a month before the date of the wedding, that David had actually seen and talked with Shirley—it was the last straw.

"But, Frank," said Shirley, puzzled, "after all—I'll admit I was a little scared at first, he *is* rather scary. But he didn't say anything that——"

"H'm," said Frank, "did he try to—bully——"

"Why—no, dear. I don't see quite why he came—except——"

"Yes?"

"Well—I had a vague sort of feeling that he was—well—looking me over—like a judge—only I don't know what he thought. He said he was coming again——"

"Well, he won't," said Frank, briefly. "This has to stop.

I can stand his spying on me, but he sha'n't touch *you*. I'll stop it, I tell you—I'll stop it——” His voice rose harshly. “Oh, I know him, Shirley—God knows what he's up to now; but he's a devil, I tell you—a devil——”

Shirley managed to quiet him for a time. But when he left her, he went straight to David's house. He walked there—it was a long way—but he felt no fatigue. The consuming rage that burned in him was too intense. It made his body feel light as pith and very strong—he was quite calm, but he felt as if, this time, he could take David and break him in his hands like a crust.

He noticed with strange detachment, as he sat there, waiting for David, that the gloomy living room had not changed since the last time he had seen it, years before. There was David's cigar box on the table, and the picture of Frances above the fireplace. The room was terribly full of David's presence. For an instant Frank was a haunted small boy again, looking round the room with scared eyes, listening for the majestic footfalls of a great, gaunt figure that stalked over gloomy carpets with the terrifying pride of a damned archangel. Then his courage and rage returned—for David came in.

David had not altered in the years. The deep eyes still burned; the grim, imperious face kept its lean and haughty repose. His walk was not quite so certain—that was all.

He carried a bundle of papers in his hand. “Well, Frank,” he said, without surprise, “sit down.”

He sat down himself and began to look through the papers, now and then making a little correction with a fountain pen. The sudden assurance of triumph flared up in Frank's mind. The papers were a shield—and an ineffective shield. David was afraid of him, at last.

Frank began to speak, and his voice had the intense composure of a man who has finally mastered his bitterest enemy. David heard him out, toward the end his pen moving slowly over a fresh sheet of paper as he listened. His attitude seemed to acknowledge defeat.

“I told you I'd break you,” Frank ended, “and I'm going to. You'll be broken within six months, no matter what happens. This is the end.”

"Broken—by you?" said David rather quietly.

Frank smiled. "Not entirely—but you couldn't have been broken without me—yet. You need some sort of a string to tie the loose sticks together into a club. I've been the string. It's taken four years, but I've tied the sticks together—in spite of your spying and watching—in spite of all you could do——"

"So you noticed my—spying," said David, and smiled.

"But now," said Frank, unheeding, "the spying must stop. Stop—do you understand? You can spy on me all you like—but you'll leave Shirley alone! I don't know what your idea was in spying on her—but this is the end of it! Do you hear?"

"Yes," said David, going on with his writing. "This is the end of it. I sha'n't bother her any more."

"Very well," said Frank. "Then——" And suddenly, in spite of the conclusiveness of his victory, he was irritated by the other's calm. "What are you writing?" he ended, illogically.

"A letter." David smiled. He came to the end of a paragraph, hesitated, and carefully signed his name. "Here," he said, and passed the papers over to Frank.

"What on——" said Frank, amazed.

"Read it," said David, and sank back in his chair.

Frank took the pages gingerly. He glanced at the heading of the letter. It began "My dear son." He looked at David, astounded, but David gave no sign. Frank settled himself to read.

"MY DEAR SON:

"I had at one time hoped to make this explanation of certain matters to you in a different manner—but I am a sick old man, now, and talk tires me. Besides, there are other reasons. So you will receive this letter in the approved manner—either after my death, or when I am so near it that there need be no hesitancy on your part in believing what I say. The doctor gives me a little while now—if I live piddlingly—which I do not intend to do.

"You may, perhaps, have wondered at many things in my attitude toward you, before you discovered what seemed to you the logical explanation of that attitude. The real

explanation goes back into the past, to the days when I first knew your mother and your father.

"There is no need of telling you what your mother was. She was an incomparable creature—a saint without pretence—the kindest and gentlest of women. Your mother gave me what happiness I have had, except the brief happiness that comes from crushing an obstacle; and if I have been able to live through these last years, it has been by remembering her. I do not demand that you believe this—but it is true.

"Your father was one of the most charming men that I have ever known—and one of the worst. He was one of those rare people whom life rots with too much sun—with too great good-fortune—and who spoil the lives closest to them with the careless cruelty of a pampered child. With every facility, with every opportunity, he was profligate, cowardly, eaten with mean little sins. I do not ask you to accept this statement on hearsay; I offer letters of his own—of your mother's—of his friends—other testimony.

"He was breaking your mother's heart when he died—and she did not know the worst—he had great skill in concealment. And now the worst is long dead and will not rise—I have seen to that. Here is the evidence, my son."

Frank, white to the lips, examined the attached sheaf of papers. He did not have to read them to the end—the damnation of a soul was written too plainly across the mildest of them. They could not have been forged; every line had the accent of truth; he knew three of the handwritings at least; he knew his mother's way of putting a thing. He sucked in a sobbing breath through tight lips, and went on reading:

"You will destroy these papers, of course.

"You must remember that I had known your mother from a child—slightly enough, but enough to know what she was. I know the men who work for me—I knew your father, too. And knowing that—I knew what the end would be, unless Chance intervened. Your mother was fatally loyal.

"Well, I took upon myself the prerogative of Chance—the prerogative of God. I was a younger man then, and I knew

my strength. I made a resolve—if Chance did not intervene within a certain space of time, I would.

“Yes, I was in love with your mother. But I gave him his chance—I stuck to my bargain. I had him in and talked to him, with some frankness. I had the right, considering his position in the company. He was as sneering as he dared—what business was it of mine? What he did in private—his private life was his own affair. He as much as boasted of your mother’s forgiveness of him—he seemed to think it a little absurd. That was hard for me to bear—but I gave him his chance.

“If he had been anything but appetites and grace, the place where I sent him might have made a man of him. But he was not—I had thought he would not be. He died there as I had thought he would die. I killed him—if you like. Deliberately! Those who assume God’s prerogative of mortal justice have their own punishment. Your mother married me—and we were happy, for a time. Yes, she was happy. Then the people began to whisper—and she died. I had not calculated upon the strength of whispers. She died. That was my punishment. But in spite of everything, I cannot regret what I did—for if it were to do over again, I would do the same.

“At least your mother trusted me till the end. If she had not, she would not have left you in my charge.

“You may never have seen your father’s picture as a child. Your physical likeness to him was startling—and it went to more than externals. You have some of his tricks of manner, even now. And, when you were a boy, you were almost entirely his.

“You could have been spoiled and petted as he was spoiled. You could have been trained in his precise likeness, body and mind—a child is impressionable, and you were very like him from the start. Sometimes it frightened me to see how like him you were. But I had a charge from your mother. I could not see you grow and become like him while I had my strength.

“You may often have thought your training a rigorous one. It was. I made it so. You may have thought me unfriendly, scornful, hateful. I was. I chose to be your enemy rather than your friend, because it is by wrestling with an

enemy almost too much for one that one gets courage and endurance and fortitude. I chose to make life hard and difficult for you, where it might have been smooth and easy, so that you would not drown in stale honey, as your father drowned. I do not repent.

"I do not repent, for with test after test, you got harder, and surer, and less afraid of anything, even of me. I made you my worthy enemy. I bound the difficult habit of years upon you like an honourable chain—and hardened, hardened it, till at last your father lay dead in you, and you had an armour not even success could pierce.

"Then, when you were a man, I let you find out, as you thought. You took it as I hoped you would take it—and the night you said you would break me, I looked at you and knew that between us we had made a man. But you were very young, and I was not quite certain.

"I made it my business to be entirely certain, though my time was growing short. But I could not face your mother and not be certain. So once again I took upon myself a certain prerogative, and where you went, I spied upon you like a ghost. In all ways I left you free to make your own decisions—and if you had fallen in the mire deliberately, I would not have raised you—or I might have raised you scornfully, and given you the petty damnation of easy riches, and died. But you did not fall. A strong man does not lie down before his enemy. You prospered instead, till now you are ready to break me, and I can go.

"I can go, for your marriage was my last concern, and I have seen you with the girl you are to marry, and seen her alone and heard her talk of you. You do not lie to women, as your father did, and you have chosen as I hoped you would choose. Your mother would like her, my son.

"Well, it has been a long task, and it is finished. I could have been kinder to you easily, though you may doubt that. I have had no son of my body. You have been my son. Sometimes, indeed more frequently than you might suppose, it was somewhat difficult not to be too kind.

"Do not think, by the way, that your present success is in any way due to me. I fought your business combinations with all my skill. But you have been too strong and adroit for me there. That is all.

"As for my material fortune, such as it is, it will go not to you but to charity, except for a certain portion, justly yours. You do not need the rest now. You would only have needed it if you had failed. There are certain things of your mother's you will probably wish to keep. I have made arrangements for that. Of course" (*a line of erasure*) "you are welcome to any of my personal effects, should you desire them.

"I wish you good fortune, my son, with a free mind, now. Perhaps it is nothing to you that when I die, I shall be able to rest, now, but it is something to me. Perhaps you have a——(*the line was unfinished*).

"Very sincerely,

"Your father,

"DAVID DAVENANT."

Frank stared up from the last page. Strange, difficult tears stung at his eyes.

"Father," he said, gently.

There was no answer.

He sprang up. "Father—Father," he called over and over; but the figure in the other chair did not stir.

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

BY RICHARD CONNELL

From *Collier's*

OFF there to the right—somewhere—is a large island,” said Whitney. “It’s rather a mystery——”

“What island is it?” Rainsford asked.

“The old charts call it ‘Ship-Trap Island,’” Whitney replied. “A suggestive name, isn’t it? Sailors have a curious dread of the place. I don’t know why. Some superstition——”

“Can’t see it,” remarked Rainsford, trying to peer through the dank tropical night that was palpable as it pressed its thick warm blackness in upon the yacht.

“You’ve good eyes,” said Whitney, with a laugh, “and I’ve seen you pick off a moose moving in the brown fall bush at four hundred yards, but even you can’t see four miles or so through a moonless Caribbean night.”

“Nor four yards,” admitted Rainsford. “Ugh! It’s like moist black velvet.”

“It will be light enough in Rio,” promised Whitney. “We should make it in a few days. I hope the jaguar guns have come from Purdey’s. We should have some good hunting up the Amazon. Great sport, hunting.”

“The best sport in the world,” agreed Rainsford.

“For the hunter,” amended Whitney. “Not for the jaguar.”

“Don’t talk rot, Whitney,” said Rainsford. “You’re a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how a jaguar feels?”

“Perhaps the jaguar does,” observed Whitney.

“Bah! They’ve no understanding.”

“Even so, I rather think they understand one thing—fear. The fear of pain and the fear of death.”

"Nonsense," laughed Rainsford. "This hot weather is making you soft, Whitney. Be a realist. The world is made up of two classes—the hunters and the huntees. Luckily, you and I are hunters. Do you think we've passed that island yet?"

"I can't tell in the dark. I hope so."

"Why?" asked Rainsford.

"The place has a reputation—a bad one."

"Cannibals?" suggested Rainsford.

"Hardly. Even cannibals wouldn't live in such a God-forsaken place. But it's gotten into sailor lore, somehow. Didn't you notice that the crew's nerves seemed a bit jumpy to-day?"

"They were a bit strange, now you mention it. Even Captain Nielsen——"

"Yes, even that tough-minded old Swede, who'd go up to the devil himself and ask him for a light. Those fishy blue eyes held a look I never saw there before. All I could get out of him was: 'This place has an evil name among seafaring men, sir.' Then he said to me, very gravely: 'Don't you feel anything?'—as if the air about us was actually poisonous. Now, you mustn't laugh when I tell you this—I did feel something like a sudden chill.

"There was no breeze. The sea was as flat as a plate-glass window. We were drawing near the island then. What I felt was a—a mental chill; a sort of sudden dread."

"Pure imagination," said Rainsford. "One superstitious sailor can taint the whole ship's company with his fear."

"Maybe. But sometimes I think sailors have an extra sense that tells them when they are in danger. Sometimes I think evil is a tangible thing—with wave lengths, just as sound and light have. An evil place can, so to speak, broadcast vibrations of evil. Anyhow, I'm glad we're getting out of this zone. Well, I think I'll turn in now, Rainsford."

"I'm not sleepy," said Rainsford. "I'm going to smoke another pipe up on the after deck."

"Good-night, then, Rainsford. See you at breakfast."

"Right. Good-night, Whitney."

There was no sound in the night as Rainsford sat there but the muffled throb of the engine that drove the yacht

swiftly through the darkness, and the swish and ripple of the wash of the propeller.

Rainsford, reclining in a steamer chair, indolently puffed on his favourite brier. The sensuous drowsiness of the night was on him. "It's so dark," he thought, "that I could sleep without closing my eyes; the night would be my eyelids——"

An abrupt sound startled him. Off to the right he heard it, and his ears, expert in such matters, could not be mistaken. Again he heard the sound, and again. Somewhere, off in the blackness, someone had fired a gun three times.

Rainsford sprang up and moved quickly to the rail, mystified. He strained his eyes in the direction from which the reports had come, but it was like trying to see through a blanket. He leaped upon the rail and balanced himself there, to get greater elevation; his pipe, striking a rope, was knocked from his mouth. He lunged for it; a short, hoarse cry came from his lips as he realized he had reached too far and had lost his balance. The cry was pinched off short as the blood-warm waters of the Caribbean Sea closed over his head.

He struggled up to the surface and tried to cry out, but the wash from the speeding yacht slapped him in the face and the salt water in his open mouth made him gag and strangle. Desperately he struck out with strong strokes after the receding lights of the yacht, but he stopped before he had swum fifty feet. A certain cool-headedness had come to him; it was not the first time he had been in a tight place. There was a chance that his cries could be heard by someone aboard the yacht, but that chance was slender, and grew more slender as the yacht raced on. He wrestled himself out of his clothes, and shouted with all his power. The lights of the yacht became faint and ever-vanishing fireflies; then they were blotted out entirely by the night.

Rainsford remembered the shots. They had come from the right, and doggedly he swam in that direction, swimming with slow, deliberate strokes, conserving his strength. For a seemingly endless time he fought the sea. He began to count his strokes; he could do possibly a hundred more and then——

Rainsford heard a sound. It came out of the darkness, a high, screaming sound, the sound of an animal in an extremity of anguish and terror.

He did not recognize the animal that made the sound; he did not try to; with fresh vitality he swam toward the sound. He heard it again; then it was cut short by another noise, crisp, staccato.

"Pistol shot," muttered Rainsford, swimming on.

Ten minutes of determined effort brought another sound to his ears—the most welcome he had ever heard—the muttering and growling of the sea breaking on a rocky shore. He was almost on the rocks before he saw them; on a night less calm he would have been shattered against them. With his remaining strength he dragged himself from the swirling waters. Jagged crags appeared to jut up into the opaqueness; he forced himself upward, hand over hand. Gasping, his hands raw, he reached a flat place at the top. Dense jungle came down to the very edge of the cliffs. What perils that tangle of trees and underbrush might hold for him did not concern Rainsford just then. All he knew was that he was safe from his enemy, the sea, and that utter weariness was on him. He flung himself down at the jungle edge and tumbled headlong into the deepest sleep of his life.

When he opened his eyes he knew from the position of the sun that it was late in the afternoon. Sleep had given him new vigour; a sharp hunger was picking at him. He looked about him, almost cheerfully.

"Where there are pistol shots, there are men. Where there are men, there is food," he thought. But what kind of men, he wondered, in so forbidding a place? An unbroken front of snarled and ragged jungle fringed the shore.

He saw no sign of a trail through the closely knit web of weeds and trees; it was easier to go along the shore, and Rainsford floundered along by the water. Not far from where he had landed, he stopped.

Some wounded thing, by the evidence a large animal, had thrashed about in the underbrush; the jungle weeds were crushed down and the moss was lacerated; one patch of weeds was stained crimson. A small, glittering object not far away caught Rainsford's eye and he picked it up. It was an empty cartridge.

"A twenty-two," he remarked. "That's odd. It must have been a fairly large animal, too. The hunter had his nerve with him to tackle it with a light gun. It's clear that

the brute put up a fight. I suppose the first three shots I heard was when the hunter flushed his quarry and wounded it. The last shot was when he trailed it here and finished it."

He examined the ground closely and found what he had hoped to find—the print of hunting boots. They pointed along the cliff in the direction he had been going. Eagerly he hurried along, now slipping on a rotten log or a loose stone, but making headway; night was beginning to settle down on the island.

Bleak darkness was blacking out the sea and jungle when Rainsford sighted the lights. He came upon them as he turned a crook in the coast line, and his first thought was that he had come upon a village, for there were many lights. But as he forged along he saw to his great astonishment that all the lights were in one enormous building—a lofty structure with pointed towers plunging upward into the gloom. His eyes made out the shadowy outlines of a palatial château; it was set on a high bluff, and on three sides of it cliffs dived down to where the sea licked greedy lips in the shadows.

"Mirage," thought Rainsford. But it was no mirage, he found, when he opened the tall spiked iron gate. The stone steps were real enough; the massive door with a leering gargoyle for a knocker was real enough; yet about it all hung an air of unreality.

He lifted the knocker, and it creaked up stiffly as if it had never before been used. He let it fall, and it startled him with its booming loudness. He thought he heard steps within; the door remained closed. Again Rainsford lifted the heavy knocker, and let it fall. The door opened then, opened as suddenly as if it were on a spring, and Rainsford stood blinking in the river of glaring gold light that poured out. The first thing Rainsford's eyes discerned was the largest man Rainsford had ever seen—a gigantic creature, solidly made and black-bearded to the waist. In his hand the man held a long-barrelled revolver, and he was pointing it straight at Rainsford's heart.

Out of the snarl of beard two small eyes regarded Rainsford.

"Don't be alarmed," said Rainsford, with a smile which he hoped was disarming. "I'm no robber. I fell off a yacht. My name is Sanger Rainsford of New York City."

The menacing look in the eyes did not change. The revolver pointed as rigidly as if the giant were a statue. He

gave no sign that he understood Rainsford's words, or that he had even heard them. He was dressed in uniform, a black uniform trimmed with gray astrakhan.

"I'm Sanger Rainsford of New York," Rainsford began again. "I fell off a yacht. I am hungry."

The man's only answer was to raise with his thumb the hammer of his revolver. Then Rainsford saw the man's free hand go to his forehead in a military salute, and he saw him click his heels together and stand at attention. Another man was coming down the broad marble steps, an erect, slender man in evening clothes. He advanced to Rainsford and held out his hand.

In a cultivated voice marked by a slight accent that gave it added precision and deliberateness, he said: "It is a very great pleasure and honour to welcome Mr. Sanger Rainsford, the celebrated hunter, to my home."

Automatically Rainsford shook the man's hand.

"I've read your book about hunting snow leopards in Tibet, you see," explained the man. "I am General Zaroff."

Rainsford's first impression was that the man was singularly handsome; his second was that there was an original, almost bizarre quality about the general's face. He was a tall man past middle age, for his hair was a vivid white; but his thick eyebrows and pointed military moustache were as black as the night from which Rainsford had come. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheek bones, a sharp-cut nose, a spare, dark face, the face of a man used to giving orders, the face of an aristocrat. Turning to the giant in uniform, the general made a sign. The giant put away his pistol, saluted, withdrew.

"Ivan is an incredibly strong fellow," remarked the general, "but he has the misfortune to be deaf and dumb. A simple fellow, but, I'm afraid, like all his race, a bit of a savage."

"Is he Russian?"

"He is a Cossack," said the general, and his smile showed red lips and pointed teeth. "So am I."

"Come," he said, "we shouldn't be chatting here. We can talk later. Now you want clothes, food, rest. You shall have them. This is a most restful spot."

Ivan had reappeared, and the general spoke to him with lips that moved but gave forth no sound.

"Follow Ivan, if you please, Mr. Rainsford," said the general. "I was about to have my dinner when you came. I'll wait for you. You'll find that my clothes will fit you, I think."

It was to a huge, beam-ceilinged bedroom with a canopied bed big enough for six men that Rainsford followed the silent giant. Ivan laid out an evening suit, and Rainsford, as he put it on, noticed that it came from a London tailor who ordinarily cut and sewed for none below the rank of duke.

The dining room to which Ivan conducted him was in many ways remarkable. There was a mediæval magnificence about it; it suggested a baronial hall of feudal times with its oaken panels, its high ceiling, its vast refectory table where two score men could sit down to eat. About the hall were the mounted heads of many animals—lions, tigers, elephants, moose, bears; larger or more perfect specimens Rainsford had never seen. At the great table the general was sitting, alone.

"You'll have a cocktail, Mr. Rainsford," he suggested. The cocktail was surpassingly good; and, Rainsford noted, the table appointments were of the finest—the linen, the crystal, the silver, the china.

They were eating *borsch*, the rich red soup with whipped cream so dear to Russian palates. Half apoclogetically General Zaroff said. "We do our best to preserve the amenities of civilization here. Please forgive any lapses. We are well off the beaten track, you know. Do you think the champagne has suffered from its long ocean trip?"

"Not in the least," declared Rainsford. He was finding the general a most thoughtful and affable host, a true cosmopolite. But there was one small trait of the general's that made Rainsford uncomfortable. Whenever he looked up from his plate he found the general studying him, appraising him narrowly.

"Perhaps," said General Zaroff, "you were surprised that I recognized your name. You see, I read all books on hunting published in English, French, and Russian. I have but one passion in my life, Mr. Rainsford, and it is the hunt."

"You have some wonderful heads here," said Rainsford as he ate a particularly well-cooked filet mignon. "That Cape buffalo is the largest I ever saw."

"Oh, that fellow. Yes, he was a monster."

"Did he charge you?"

"Hurled me against a tree," said the general. "Fractured my skull. But I got the brute."

"I've always thought," said Rainsford, "that the Cape buffalo is the most dangerous of all big game."

For a moment the general did not reply; he was smiling his curious red-lipped smile. Then he said slowly: "No. You are wrong, sir. The Cape buffalo is not the most dangerous big game." He sipped his wine. "Here in my preserve on this island," he said, in the same slow tone, "I hunt more dangerous game."

Rainsford expressed his surprise. "Is there big game on this island?"

The general nodded. "The biggest."

"Really?"

"Oh, it isn't here naturally, of course. I have to stock the island."

"What have you imported, General?" Rainsford asked. "Tigers?"

The general smiled. "No," he said. "Hunting tigers ceased to interest me some years ago. I exhausted their possibilities, you see. No thrill left in tigers, no real danger. I live for danger, Mr. Rainsford."

The general took from his pocket a gold cigarette case and offered his guest a long black cigarette with a silver tip; it was perfumed and gave off a smell like incense.

"We will have some capital hunting, you and I," said the general. "I shall be most glad to have your society."

"But what game——" began Rainsford.

"I'll tell you," said the general. "You will be amused, I know. I think I may say, in all modesty, that I have done a rare thing. I have invented a new sensation. May I pour you another glass of port, Mr. Rainsford?"

"Thank you, General."

The general filled both glasses, and said: "God makes some men poets. Some He makes kings, some beggars. Me He made a hunter. My hand was made for the trigger, my father said. He was a very rich man with a quarter of a million acres in the Crimea, and he was an ardent sportsman. When I was only five years old he gave me a little gun, specially made in Moscow for me, to shoot sparrows

with. When I shot some of his prize turkeys with it, he did not punish me; he complimented me on my marksmanship. I killed my first bear in the Caucasus when I was ten. My whole life has been one prolonged hunt. I went into the army—it was expected of noblemen's sons—and for a time commanded a division of Cossack cavalry, but my real interest was always the hunt. I have hunted every kind of game in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed."

The general puffed at his cigarette.

"After the débâcle in Russia I left the country, for it was imprudent for an officer of the Tsar to stay there. Many noble Russians lost everything. I, luckily, had invested heavily in American securities, so I shall never have to open a tea room in Monte Carlo or drive a taxi in Paris. Naturally, I continued to hunt—grizzlies in your Rockies, crocodiles in the Ganges, rhinoceroses in East Africa. It was in Africa that the Cape buffalo hit me and laid me up for six months. As soon as I recovered I started for the Amazon to hunt jaguars, for I had heard they were unusually cunning. They weren't." The Cossack sighed. "They were no match at all for a hunter with his wits about him, and a high-powered rifle. I was bitterly disappointed. I was lying in my tent with a splitting headache one night when a terrible thought pushed its way into my mind. Hunting was beginning to bore me! And hunting, remember, had been my life. I have heard that in America business men often go to pieces when they give up the business that has been their life."

"Yes, that's so," said Rainsford.

The general smiled. "I had no wish to go to pieces," he said. "I must do something. Now, mine is an analytical mind, Mr. Rainsford. Doubtless that is why I enjoy the problems of the chase."

"No doubt, General Zaroff."

"So," continued the general, "I asked myself why the hunt no longer fascinated me. You are much younger than I am, Mr. Rainsford, and have not hunted as much, but you perhaps can guess the answer."

"What was it?"

"Simply this: hunting had ceased to be what you call 'a

sporting proposition.' It had become too easy. I always got my quarry. Always. There is no greater bore than perfection."

The general lit a fresh cigarette.

"No animal had a chance with me any more. That is no boast; it is a mathematical certainty. The animal had nothing but his legs and his instinct. Instinct is no match for reason. When I thought of this it was a tragic moment for me, I can tell you."

Rainsford leaned across the table, absorbed in what his host was saying.

"It came to me as an inspiration what I must do," the general went on.

"And that was?"

The general smiled the quiet smile of one who has faced an obstacle and surmounted it with success. "I had to invent a new animal to hunt," he said.

"A new animal? You're joking."

"Not at all," said the general. "I never joke about hunting. I needed a new animal. I found one. So I bought this island, built this house, and here I do my hunting. The island is perfect for my purposes—there are jungles with a maze of trails in them, hills, swamps——"

"But the animal, General Zaroff?"

"Oh," said the general, "it supplies me with the most exciting hunting in the world. No other hunting compares with it for an instant. Every day I hunt, and I never grow bored now, for I have a quarry with which I can match my wits."

Rainsford's bewilderment showed in his face.

"I wanted the ideal animal to hunt," explained the general. "So I said: 'What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?' And the answer was, of course: 'It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason.'"

"But no animal can reason," objected Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "there is one that can."

"But you can't mean——" gasped Rainsford.

"And why not?"

"I can't believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a grisly joke."

"Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting."

"Hunting? Good God, General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder."

The general laughed with entire good nature. He regarded Rainsford quizzically. "I refuse to believe that so modern and civilized a young man as you seem to be harbours romantic ideas about the value of human life. Surely your experiences in the war——"

"Did not make me condone cold-blooded murder," finished Rainsford, stiffly.

Laughter shook the general. "How extraordinarily droll you are!" he said. "One does not expect nowadays to find a young man of the educated class, even in America, with such a naïve, and, if I may say so, mid-Victorian point of view. It's like finding a snuffbox in a limousine. Ah, well, doubtless you had Puritan ancestors. So many Americans appear to have had. I'll wager you'll forget your notions when you go hunting with me. You've a genuine new thrill in store for you, Mr. Rainsford."

"Thank you, I'm a hunter, not a murderer."

"Dear me," said the general, quite unruffled, "again that unpleasant word. But I think I can show you that your scruples are quite ill founded."

"Yes?"

"Life is for the strong, to be lived by the strong, and, if needs be, taken by the strong. The weak of the world were put here to give the strong pleasure. I am strong. Why should I not use my gift? If I wish to hunt, why should I not? I hunt the scum of the earth—sailors from tramp ships—lascars, blacks, Chinese, whites, mongrels—a thoroughbred horse or hound is worth more than a score of them."

"But they are men," said Rainsford, hotly.

"Precisely," said the general. "That is why I use them. It gives me pleasure. They can reason, after a fashion. So they are dangerous."

"But where do you get them?"

The general's left eyelid fluttered down in a wink. "This island is called Ship Trap," he answered. "Sometimes an angry god of the high seas sends them to me. Sometimes,

when Providence is not so kind, I help Providence a bit. Come to the window with me."

Rainsford went to the window and looked out toward the sea.

"Watch! Out there!" exclaimed the general, pointing into the night. Rainsford's eyes saw only blackness, and then, as the general pressed a button, far out to sea Rainsford saw the flash of lights.

The general chuckled. "They indicate a channel," he said, "where there's none: giant rocks with razor edges crouch like a sea monster with wide-open jaws. They can crush a ship as easily as I crush this nut." He dropped a walnut on the hardwood floor and brought his heel grinding down on it. "Oh, yes," he said, casually, as if in answer to a question. "I have electricity. We try to be civilized here."

"Civilized? And you shoot down men?"

A trace of anger was in the general's black eyes, but it was there for but a second, and he said, in his most pleasant manner: "Dear me, what a righteous young man you are! I assure you I do not do the thing you suggest. That would be barbarous. I treat these visitors with every consideration. They get plenty of good food and exercise. They get into splendid physical condition. You shall see for yourself tomorrow."

"What do you mean?"

"We'll visit my training school," smiled the general. "It's in the cellar. I have about a dozen pupils down there now. They're from the Spanish bark *Sanlúcar* that had the bad luck to go on the rocks out there. A very inferior lot, I regret to say. Poor specimens and more accustomed to the deck than to the jungle."

He raised his hand, and Ivan, who served as waiter, brought thick Turkish coffee. Rainsford, with an effort, held his tongue in check.

"It's a game, you see," pursued the general, blandly. "I suggest to one of them that we go hunting. I give him a supply of food and an excellent hunting knife. I give him three hours' start. I am to follow, armed only with a pistol of the smallest calibre and range. If my quarry eludes me for three whole days, he wins the game. If I find him"—the general smiled—"he loses."

"Suppose he refuses to be hunted?"

"Oh," said the general, "I give him his option, of course. He need not play that game if he doesn't wish to. If he does not wish to hunt, I turn him over to Ivan. Ivan once had the honour of serving as official knouter to the Great White Tsar, and he has his own ideas of sport. Invariably, Mr. Rainsford, invariably they choose the hunt."

"And if they win?"

The smile on the general's face widened. "To date I have not lost," he said.

Then he added, hastily: "I don't wish you to think me a braggart, Mr. Rainsford. Many of them afford only the most elementary sort of problem. Occasionally I strike a tartar. One almost did win. I eventually had to use the dogs."

"The dogs?"

"This way, please. I'll show you."

The general steered Rainsford to a window. The lights from the windows sent a flickering illumination that made grotesque patterns on the courtyard below, and Rainsford could see moving about there a dozen or so huge black shapes; as they turned toward him, their eyes glittered greenly.

"A rather good lot, I think," observed the general. "They are let out at seven every night. If any one should try to get into my house—or out of it—something extremely regrettable would occur to him." He hummed a snatch of song from the *Folies Bergère*.

"And now," said the general, "I want to show you my new collection of heads. Will you come with me to the library?"

"I hope," said Rainsford, "that you will excuse me to-night, General Zaroff. I'm really not feeling at all well."

"Ah, indeed?" the general inquired, solicitously. "Well, I suppose that's only natural, after your long swim. You need a good, restful night's sleep. To-morrow you'll feel like a new man, I'll wager. Then we'll hunt, eh? I've one rather promising prospect——"

Rainsford was hurrying from the room.

"Sorry you can't go with me to-night," called the general. "I expect rather fair sport—a big, strong black. He looks resourceful—— Well, good-night, Mr. Rainsford; I hope you have a good night's rest."

The bed was good, and the pajamas of the softest silk, and he was tired in every fibre of his being, but nevertheless Rainsford could not quiet his brain with the opiate of sleep. He lay, eyes wide open. Once he thought he heard stealthy steps in the corridor outside his room. He sought to throw open the door; it would not open. He went to the window and looked out. His room was high up in one of the towers. The lights of the château were out now, and it was dark and silent, but there was a fragment of sallow moon, and by its wan light he could see, dimly, the courtyard; there, weaving in and out in the pattern of shadow, were black, noiseless forms; the hounds heard him at the window and looked up, expectantly, with their green eyes. Rainsford went back to the bed and lay down. By many methods he tried to put himself to sleep. He had achieved a doze when, just as morning began to come, he heard, far off in the jungle, the faint report of a pistol.

General Zaroff did not appear until luncheon. He was dressed faultlessly in the tweeds of a country squire. He was solicitous about the state of Rainsford's health.

"As for me," sighed the general, "I do not feel so well. I am worried, Mr. Rainsford. Last night I detected traces of my old complaint."

To Rainsford's questioning glance the general said: "Ennui. Boredom."

Then, taking a second helping of Crêpes Suzette, the general explained: "The hunting was not good last night. The fellow lost his head. He made a straight trail that offered no problems at all. That's the trouble with these sailors; they have dull brains to begin with, and they do not know how to get about in the woods. They do excessively stupid and obvious things. It's most annoying. Will you have another glass of Chablis, Mr. Rainsford?"

"General," said Rainsford, firmly, "I wish to leave this island at once."

The general raised his thickets of eyebrows; he seemed hurt. "But, my dear fellow," the general protested, "you've only just come. You've had no hunting——"

"I wish to go to-day," said Rainsford. He saw the dead black eyes of the general on him, studying him. General Zaroff's face suddenly brightened.

He filled Rainsford's glass with venerable Chablis from a dusty bottle.

"To-night," said the general, "we will hunt—you and I."

Rainsford shook his head. "No, General," he said. "I will not hunt."

The general shrugged his shoulders and delicately ate a hothouse grape. "As you wish, my friend," he said. "The choice rests entirely with you. But may I not venture to suggest that you will find my idea of sport more diverting than Ivan's?"

He nodded toward the corner to where the giant stood, scowling, his thick arms crossed on his hogshead of chest.

"You don't mean——" cried Rainsford.

"My dear fellow," said the general, "have I not told you I always mean what I say about hunting? This is really an inspiration. I drink to a foeman worthy of my steel—at last."

The general raised his glass, but Rainsford sat staring at him.

"You'll find this game worth playing," the general said, enthusiastically. "Your brain against mine. Your woodcraft against mine. Your strength and stamina against mine. Outdoor chess! And the stake is not without value, eh?"

"And if I win——" began Rainsford huskily.

"I'll cheerfully acknowledge myself defeated if I do not find you by midnight of the third day," said General Zaroff.

"My sloop will place you on the mainland near a town."

The general read what Rainsford was thinking.

"Oh, you can trust me," said the Cossack. "I will give you my word as a gentleman and a sportsman. Of course, you, in turn, must agree to say nothing of your visit here."

"I'll agree to nothing of the kind," said Rainsford.

"Oh," said the general, "in that case—— But why discuss that now? Three days hence we can discuss it over a bottle of Veuve Cliquot, unless——"

The general sipped his wine.

Then a businesslike air animated him. "Ivan," he said to Rainsford, "will supply you with hunting clothes, food, a knife. I suggest you wear moccasins; they leave a poorer trail. I suggest, too, that you avoid the big swamp in the southeast corner of the island. We call it Death Swamp.

There's quicksand there. One foolish fellow tried it. The deplorable part of it was that Lazarus followed him. You can imagine my feelings, Mr. Rainsford. I loved Lazarus; he was the finest hound in my pack. Well, I must beg you to excuse me now. I always take a siesta after lunch. You'll hardly have time for a nap, I fear. You'll want to start, no doubt. I shall not follow till dusk. Hunting at night is so much more exciting than by day, don't you think? *Au revoir*, Mr. Rainsford, *au revoir*."

General Zaroff, with a deep, courtly bow, strolled from the room.

From another door came Ivan. Under one arm he carried khaki hunting clothes, a haversack of food, a leather sheath containing a long-bladed hunting knife; his right hand rested on a cocked revolver thrust in the crimson sash about his waist. . . .

Rainsford had fought his way through the bush for two hours. "I must keep my nerve. I must keep my nerve," he said, through tight teeth.

He had not been entirely clear-headed when the château gates snapped shut behind him. His whole idea at first was to put distance between himself and General Zaroff, and, to this end, he had plunged along, spurred on by the sharp rowels of something very like panic. Now he had got a grip on himself, had stopped, and was taking stock of himself and the situation.

He saw that straight flight was futile; inevitably it would bring him face to face with the sea. He was in a picture with a frame of water, and his operations, clearly, must take place within that frame.

"I'll give him a trail to follow," muttered Rainsford, and he struck off from the rude path he had been following into the trackless wilderness. He executed a series of intricate loops; he doubled on his trail again and again, recalling all the lore of the fox hunt, and all the dodges of the fox. Night found him leg-weary, with hands and face lashed by the branches, on a thickly wooded ridge. He knew it would be insane to blunder on through the dark, even if he had the strength. His need for rest was imperative and he thought: "I have played the fox, now I must play the cat of the fable." A big tree with a thick trunk and outspread branches was

near by, and, taking care to leave not the slightest mark, he climbed up into the crotch, and stretching out on one of the broad limbs, after a fashion, rested. Rest brought him new confidence and almost a feeling of security. Even so zealous a hunter as General Zaroff could not trace him there, he told himself; only the devil himself could follow that complicated trail through the jungle after dark. But perhaps the general was a devil——

An apprehensive night crawled slowly by like a wounded snake, and sleep did not visit Rainsford, although the silence of a dead world was on the jungle. Toward morning, when a dingy gray was varnishing the sky, the cry of some startled bird focussed Rainsford's attention in that direction. Something was coming through the bush, coming slowly, carefully, coming by the same winding way Rainsford had come. He flattened himself down on the limb, and through a screen of leaves almost as thick as tapestry, he watched. The thing that was approaching was a man.

It was General Zaroff. He made his way along with his eyes fixed in utmost concentration on the ground before him. He paused, almost beneath the tree, dropped to his knees, and studied the ground. Rainsford's impulse was to hurl himself down like a panther, but he saw that the general's right hand held something metallic—a small automatic pistol.

The hunter shook his head several times, as if he were puzzled. Then he straightened up and took from his case one of his black cigarettes; its pungent incense-like smoke floated up to Rainsford's nostrils.

Rainsford held his breath. The general's eyes had left the ground and were travelling inch by inch up the tree. Rainsford froze there, every muscle tensed for a spring. But the sharp eyes of the hunter stopped before they reached the limb where Rainsford lay; a smile spread over his brown face. Very deliberately he blew a smoke ring into the air; then he turned his back on the tree and walked carelessly away, back along the trail he had come. The swish of the underbrush against his hunting boots grew fainter and fainter.

The pent-up air burst hotly from Rainsford's lungs. His first thought made him feel sick and numb. The general could follow a trail through the woods at night; he could

follow an extremely difficult trail; he must have uncanny powers; only by the merest chance had the Cossack failed to see his quarry.

Rainsford's second thought was even more terrible. It sent a shudder of cold horror through his whole being. Why had the general smiled? Why had he turned back?

Rainsford did not want to believe what his reason told him was true, but the truth was as evident as the sun that had by now pushed through the morning mists. The general was playing with him! The general was saving him for another day's sport! The Cossack was the cat; he was the mouse. Then it was that Rainsford knew the full meaning of terror.

"I will not lose my nerve. I will not."

He slid down from the tree, and struck off again into the woods. His face was set and he forced the machinery of his mind to function. Three hundred yards from his hiding place he stopped where a huge dead tree leaned precariously on a smaller, living one. Throwing off his sack of food, Rainsford took his knife from its sheath and began to work with all his energy.

The job was finished at last, and he threw himself down behind a fallen log a hundred feet away. He did not have to wait long. The cat was coming again to play with the mouse.

Following the trail with the sureness of a bloodhound came General Zaroff. Nothing escaped those searching black eyes, no crushed blade of grass, no bent twig, no mark, no matter how faint, in the moss. So intent was the Cossack on his stalking that he was upon the thing Rainsford had made before he saw it. His foot touched the protruding bough that was the trigger. Even as he touched it, the general sensed his danger and leaped back with the agility of an ape. But he was not quite quick enough; the dead tree, delicately adjusted to rest on the cut living one, crashed down and struck the general a glancing blow on the shoulder as it fell; but for his alertness, he must have been smashed beneath it. He staggered, but he did not fall; nor did he drop his revolver. He stood there, rubbing his injured shoulder, and Rainsford, with fear again gripping his heart, heard the general's mocking laugh ring through the jungle.

"Rainsford," called the general, "if you are within sound of my voice, as I suppose you are, let me congratulate you. Not many men know how to make a Malay man-catcher. Luckily for me I, too, have hunted in Malacca. You are proving interesting, Mr. Rainsford. I am going now to have my wound dressed; it's only a slight one. But I shall be back. I shall be back."

When the general, nursing his bruised shoulder, had gone, Rainsford took up his flight again. It was flight now, a desperate, hopeless flight, that carried him on for some hours. Dusk came, then darkness, and still he pressed on. The ground grew softer under his moccasins; the vegetation grew ranker, denser; insects bit him savagely. Then, as he stepped forward, his foot sank into the ooze. He tried to wrench it back, but the muck sucked viciously at his foot as if it were a giant leech. With a violent effort he tore his foot loose. He knew where he was now. Death Swamp and its quicksand.

His hands were tight closed as if his nerve were something tangible that someone in the darkness was trying to tear from his grip. The softness of the earth had given him an idea. He stepped back from the quicksand a dozen feet or so and, like some huge prehistoric beaver, he began to dig.

Rainsford had dug himself in in France when a second's delay meant death. That had been a placid pastime compared to his digging now. The pit grew deeper; when it was above his shoulders, he climbed out and from some hard saplings cut stakes and sharpened them to a fine point. These stakes he planted in the bottom of the pit with the points sticking up. With flying fingers he wove a rough carpet of weeds and branches and with it he covered the mouth of the pit. Then, wet with sweat and aching with tiredness, he crouched behind the stump of a lightning-charred tree.

He knew his pursuer was coming; he heard the padding sound of feet on the soft earth, and the night breeze brought him the perfume of the general's cigarette. It seemed to Rainsford that the general was coming with unusual swiftness; he was not feeling his way along, foot by foot. Rainsford, crouching there, could not see the general, nor could he see

the pit. He lived a year in a minute. Then he felt an impulse to cry aloud with joy, for he heard the sharp crackle of the breaking branches as the cover of the pit gave way; he heard the sharp scream of pain as the pointed stakes found their mark. He leaped up from his place of concealment. Then he cowered back. Three feet from the pit a man was standing, with an electric torch in his hand.

"You've done well, Rainsford," the voice of the general called. "Your Burmese tiger pit has claimed one of my best dogs. Again you score. I think, Mr. Rainsford, I'll see what you can do against my whole pack. I'm going home for a rest now. Thank you for a most amusing evening."

At daybreak Rainsford, lying near the swamp, was awakened by a sound that made him know that he had new things to learn about fear. It was a distant sound, faint and wavering, but he knew it. It was the baying of a pack of hounds.

Rainsford knew he could do one of two things. He could stay where he was and wait. That was suicide. He could flee. That was postponing the inevitable. For a moment he stood there, thinking. An idea that held a wild chance came to him, and, tightening his belt, he headed away from the swamp.

The baying of the hounds drew nearer, then still nearer, nearer, ever nearer. On a ridge Rainsford climbed a tree. Down a watercourse, not a quarter of a mile away, he could see the bush moving. Straining his eyes, he saw the lean figure of General Zaroff; just ahead of him, Rainsford made out another figure whose wide shoulders surged through the tall jungle weeds; it was the giant Ivan, and he seemed pulled forward by some unseen force; Rainsford knew that Ivan must be holding the pack in leash.

They would be on him any minute now. His mind worked frantically. He thought of a native trick he had learned in Uganda. He slid down the tree. He caught hold of a springy young sapling and to it he fastened his hunting knife, with the blade pointing down the trail; with a bit of wild grapevine he tied back the sapling. Then he ran for his life. The hounds raised their voices as they hit the fresh scent. Rainsford knew now how an animal at bay feels.

He had to stop to get his breath. The baying of the hounds stopped abruptly, and Rainsford's heart stopped, too. They must have reached the knife.

He shinned excitedly up a tree and looked back. His pursuers had stopped. But the hope that was in Rainsford's brain when he climbed died, for he saw in the shallow valley that General Zaroff was still on his feet. But Ivan was not. The knife, driven by the recoil of the springing tree, had not wholly failed.

Rainsford had hardly tumbled to the ground when the pack took up the cry again.

"Nerve, nerve, nerve!" he panted, as he dashed along. A blue gap showed between the trees dead ahead. Ever nearer drew the hounds. Rainsford forced himself on toward that gap. He reached it. It was the shore of the sea. Across a cove he could see the gloomy gray stone of the château. Twenty feet below him the sea rumbled and hissed. Rainsford hesitated. He heard the hounds. Then he leaped far out into the sea. . . .

When the general and his pack reached the place by the sea, the Cossack stopped. For some minutes he stood regarding the blue-green expanse of water. He shrugged his shoulders. Then he sat down, took a drink of brandy from a silver flask, lit a perfumed cigarette, and hummed a bit from "*Madama Butterfly*."

General Zaroff had an exceedingly good dinner in his great panelled dining hall that evening. With it he had a bottle of Pol Roger and half a bottle of Chambertin. Two slight annoyances kept him from perfect enjoyment. One was the thought that it would be difficult to replace Ivan; the other was that his quarry had escaped him; of course the American hadn't played the game—so thought the general as he tasted his after-dinner liqueur. In his library he read, to soothe himself, from the works of Marcus Aurelius. At ten he went up to his bedroom. He was deliciously tired, he said to himself, as he locked himself in. There was a little moonlight, so before turning on his light he went to the window and looked down at the courtyard. He could see the great hounds, and he called: "Better luck another time," to them. Then he switched on the light.

A man, who had been hiding in the curtains of the bed, was standing there.

"Rainsford!" screamed the general. "How in God's name did you get here?"

"Swam," said Rainsford. "I found it quicker than walking through the jungle."

The general sucked in his breath and smiled. "I congratulate you," he said. "You have won the game."

Rainsford did not smile. "I am still a beast at bay," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "Get ready, General Zaroff."

The general made one of his deepest bows. "I see," he said. "Splendid! One of us is to furnish a repast for the hounds. The other will sleep in this very excellent bed. On guard, Rainsford. . . ."

He had never slept in a better bed, Rainsford decided.

HORSE AND HORSE

By CHARLES CALDWELL DOBIE

From Harper's

HANK WHEELOCK'S first conclusion was that he had come upon a vagrant snow patch. But the idea had barely emerged before he realized its absurdity. Could it be that the scorching humour of the desert had at last seared him to a point of daftness? . . . He moved slowly toward the outer rim of whiteness, as if fearful lest the vision might dissolve, but the mirage did not recede; it became if anything more tangible, more crystalline, more emphatic. Surely this pool of frozen purity had not been there last week.

He bent over, tracing figures in the glistening surface with his gun: if he were mad his new estate had been accomplished with completeness! He next trusted his fingers to a confirmation of the fact before him. He had almost expected a cool reaction, but the scorch of accumulated sunshine bit ruthlessly into his flesh. Immediately every spark of animation was extinguished within him: the suggestion flashing through his mind was too tremendous, too fantastic to be met save in complete immobility. For a full minute he lay upon his belly, there in the yellow sand, like a huge gray lizard fascinated by the prospect of an iridescent meal. When he moved again, it was to scoop up a handful of burning whiteness. Even now he did not altogether credit his senses. He moistened a forefinger, carrying its powdered surface back to his tongue. He knew the look of it, the taste of it, and yet he was not to be trapped unduly. He whipped out his pocket magnifier. His conclusions were reluctant, constrained by the incautions of a lifetime. Borax? . . . Could it be possible—here by the roadway's rim within a day's journey of the railroad? . . . He felt himself grow suddenly weak and he had the wit to realize that the

sun was in no humour to brook defiance. He moved slowly into the truce of a rocky ledge, sprawling full length in its shadow. Overhead, three buzzards formed a sinister merry-go-round against the turquoise sky. Their foul expectations made Hank Wheelock chuckle. In spite of his sixty years he was a long way from cashing in. Them fool buzzards! Didn't they know a tough old coyote when they saw one? Besides, he wasn't quite ready to provide grub for such an ornery lot of feathered bandits—not yet. He'd have another look at that outcropping of borax first. *Borax!* . . . He closed his eyes. Just wait until he told Jim Bledsoe about it! Foolish, futile Jim Bledsoe. Perhaps he wouldn't tell him! Perhaps he wouldn't tell nobody. It would depend.

He opened his eyes again. The buzzards had dropped a shade lower. A hot breeze began to catch up little whirls of sand and the loose pungent odours of the sagebrush. An intolerable longing for some far-off and dusky coolness oppressed Hank Wheelock. He thought of hedgerows and columbine and hollyhocks and the faint tinkle of silver fountains. After all, he *was* tired and old and ready to quit! And the buzzards overhead knew it. . . . But they didn't know that his luck had turned, that he had fortune by the throat. They didn't know that his was the surrender that always came within sight of the goal. . . . If they had they wouldn't have wasted time circling about him in such a calm, anticipatory frenzy.

He pulled himself to his feet, dragging back to that pool of whiteness which even now held such an element of unreality. Yes, it was still there—bared unaccountably for his achievement: A glimpse, a mere indication of what must lie buried for miles in every direction under the deceitful gray of the desert. And, in a sudden spasm of joy, he felt himself tossing his hat into the air and heard the exultant cry issuing from his throat, swallowed up flatly by the unhemmed spaces.

Overhead, the buzzards had ceased their circling. For a brief instant they held themselves motionless, then swept eastward with calm deliberation.

In the cool of evening Hank Wheelock went through the primitive gesture of marking the confines of his prospect with

bits of shale chipped from the ledge that had sheltered him from the sun. The definite rules for staking a claim he was unprepared to meet and yet some atavistic urge, harking back to the days when men made covenants with the gods, gave him a foolish pleasure in setting up symbols of his revelation. What he would have liked to do was to sweep back the sand over his treasure with a miraculous rake. There would be people passing and repassing, Indians for the most part, intent on the piñon harvest, perhaps gathering mesquite beans, or working toward the streams with their fish snares. These scarcely mattered, but others would pass, too—white men, with little sharp, beady eyes, seeking furtively to wrest secrets from the sun-bitten land. But the desert was capricious; it rewarded whom it would. Take his own case for instance: How many times had he scoured the blunt, squeezed hills to no purpose, coveting their treasures? . . . And this same spot, with its ledge of rock that marked a waterhole of almost miraculous sweetness, how many times had he loitered in its gaunt shade, innocent of its hoard? . . . Last week, when he had tramped eastward to another futile tryst with fortune, his path had been without revelation. The country had lain somnolent under a blazing sun, taciturn and baffling, as always. But overnight a miracle had happened: a wanton wind had danced with gathering violence across the starlit mesa, furrowing the gleaming sand with its twinkling feet, tearing open quiescent wounds in its frenzy, revealing close-locked secrets. . . . To-night it was conceivable that another wind might rise, blotting out all trace of the one that had gone before, piling the restless sand discreetly back again. Hank Wheelock hoped that this might be so; such a prospect made him feel safer. He wanted to hoard his good fortune for a season, to guard it jealously. Would it be necessary to tell Jim Bledsoe? Not right off, anyhow. . . . He'd bide his time. . . . He might even persuade himself beyond that. . . . He'd do what was right, but he wasn't going to be no fool philanthropist. If they had come upon this secret together, that would have been one thing. . . . But they hadn't. . . . Yet Jim Bledsoe was still his partner.

Well, there was time enough to settle that. He wouldn't reach camp until the next morning. Twelve hours of solitude

in which to wrestle with the problem. That was enough for any man. . . . He decided to wait until nightfall before pushing on. When the moon rose he'd start. He flung himself back into the shelter of the rocky ledge. He wondered whether the buzzards would come winging back again. . . . But they didn't, and he fell asleep, chuckling.

He rose with a windless moon, heading south by west, munching thin strips of jerked venison as he walked. He was a spare eater on the trail and he drank from his canteen scantily, barely moistening his lips. The land lay in a cool truce of incredible silver, invoking dreams and fancies and extravagances. He felt a mysterious affinity with hidden forces; like some primitive hero who had been singled out for favour by the gods. His discovery of the afternoon linked him with the elements, made him touch hands with illimitable time and space. He thought vaguely of the extraordinary patience of nature and its still more extraordinary whimsies. Imagine piling up a glistening treasure for millions of years, then hiding it slyly, in the end to yield the secret to a chance passer-by. He had seen uncovered borax marshes in his day, stretching mile upon mile under a blazing sun, but never before had there come to his knowledge one discreetly buried, like a dead city of the ancients. He tried to imagine it lying stark and white, as it must one day have done, picturing the first thin line of whirling sand that had drifted upon its pallid face. A few grains of sand . . . mere specks of golden grayness. Grains piling up to a handful. An island in the centre of a crystalline sea . . . the sea itself completely hidden! Then shrubs and reptiles and birds in their season. The primitive deceit accomplished. He ended by being staggered at so much elemental perseverance. It was like sprawling at full length with one's eyes upturned to the stars; it crushed you, somehow, until in very self-defence you turned away.

He saved his egotism by veering to problems within grasp. There was the matter of claim-staking, of launching a promotion scheme, of transportation. Twenty years before his imagination would have evoked endless mule teams chiming through the blistering heat to a railroad siding; now he supposed motor trucks would accomplish the task swiftly and

adequately. *Hank Wheelock, the new Borax King!* He ruffled with childish pride at the mere thought. . . . But at that he might sell out at once and let somebody else bask in the warmth of the title. This last speculation brought him sharply against the question of Jim Bledsoe again: Would he be justified in dissolving his partnership at this point? Not that he grudged Jim Bledsoe a share in his good fortune—oh, no, it wasn't that! But a man with a big project ought to have a clear field to develop it, without let or hindrance. Of course, he supposed Jim Bledsoe would give him a free rein, but then a man could never tell!

It wasn't as if the idea had never before occurred: for upward of forty years he had made periodic gestures toward cutting loose from Jim Bledsoe, to find him always in the end taking the path of least resistance. After all, it wasn't easy to ditch a partner who had the genial vice of optimism, who could rise from the most crushing defeat upon the wings of an irrational hope, whose rainbow fell always just a day's journey beyond. But looking back, Hank Wheelock had to admit that this had been Jim's sole contribution to their common cause: the claims they had staked, the boom towns they had entered, the mining stocks they had purchased on the strength of Jim Bledsoe's enthusiasms! And all to no purpose. . . . It was easy to trace the history of every move they had made toward opulence. The end was always the same; they had picked their penniless way back to the hills to pan dribbles of gold from reluctant stream-sides, or follow a promising ledge to its shallow source, or meet a quick turn in fortune on the spin of a faro wheel. But even then it had been Wheelock's luck that stood by. When had Bledsoe ever washed so much as a solitary nugget from a creek bed, or fallen upon a single gilded outcropping in the blunt, scarred hills, or played a winning number to retrieve their wasted substance? Never once in all them forty years, Wheelock told himself with a note of emphatic satisfaction.

Of course, no matter what his decision he'd never let old Bledsoe want: he'd be generous. And with keen delight he pictured himself in the rôle of patron, distributing largess. . . . Giving anybody a direct share—well, that was different. People never thanked you for what you conceded were their rights, and the term "partnership" would smother any

impulse toward gratitude in Jim Bledsoe. To his dying day Jim would argue:

"Well, who knows—if Hank hadn't struck it rich mebbe I would have!"

And the worst of it all was that old Jim Bledsoe would believe it. Forty luckless years hadn't taught him anything. Wasn't he at this very moment out on another of his foolish quests? How foolish, Hank Wheelock could only speculate, since Jim had enveloped his movements in childish mystery. He'd said casually one night over their beans and coffee:

"I had a notion I'd run up toward Heron Falls for a spell. . . . You ain't got any use for that pack animal, have yer? Leastways, not before next week?"

Hank Wheelock had tried to veil his scorn under a show of indifference. "Pack animal? . . . I should say not! . . . I ain't figuring on taking more'n a ton of ore outer that pocket back of Antelope."

His sarcasm had winged past Jim. "Well," Bledsoe had replied, "yer never can tell. . . . I allus figured there might be a likely lead in there. . . . Still, I kinder lean to a country that ain't so all-fired ornery. Prospects, I say, is a good deal like women folks; it may be a mite harder to find 'em both rich and pretty, but it can be done!"

Wheelock had met this statement with the silent contempt it deserved: Neither Bledsoe's prospects nor his women had ever qualified in either particular.

Well, there hadn't been a likely lead back of Antelope . . . there hadn't been a dribble of ore large enough to so much as fill the obsolete watch pocket in Hank Wheelock's sun-bleached coat. The country had been like Jim Bledsoe's women, at once destitute and forbidding. On the surface, of course. It hadn't opened its hand to a man poking about for trifles. . . . Hank Wheelock might have known that, he might have guessed that its frugality had an element of concealment in it, like some crusty old philanthropist making gestures toward poverty to test the object of its favour. . . . He speculated with a derisive grunt what sort of geological philandering Jim Bledsoe was up to around Heron Falls. A soft country, truly—buried in a carpet of pine needles; full of the muffled whirr of quail coveys; spilling water in lacy cascades down its greenly wreathed sides. A place

for loafing, a spot to rob you of everything but content, a sure despoiler of ambition. . . . Jim had gone there fishing, that was it. And one day he'd blow back into camp with a mess of trout and an air of carrying the plunder of an empire in his straw-packed fishing basket. . . . Hank Wheelock knew! . . . A mess of fish—nothing more or less.

He, Hank Wheelock, would be bringing back a fortune and his partner, Jim Bledsoe, would throw down a dozen trout as his contribution to the jackpot. . . . Not this time! It didn't take Hank Wheelock one half of his allotted twelve hours to settle that question. The moon had scarcely risen to its full height when he had come to a final and irrevocable decision.

For the rest of the journey he was content with a thousand opulent anticipations, not the least of which was the ever-recurring picture of himself in the rôle of patron to old Jim Bledsoe. This speculation had a pungent sting to it, like a dash of spice in a draught of mulled wine. He didn't think of it as insolence because, one thing, he didn't know that insolence was at the back of every condescension, but chiefly because his sense of introspection had been seasoned beneath the sky-blue of heaven. He saw only the large masses on a canvas in which generosity loomed big. He ignored its shadow. Suddenly he had made the first step toward despotism—he was willing to grant a million privileges but not a single right. And in his new-found arrogance he felt that if he but reached upward he could have touched the stars!

Toward daybreak he saw afar the curling gray of a camp fire, and he knew that Jim Bledsoe was already back. This fact disturbed him: he hadn't reckoned on facing so swiftly the issue uppermost in his mind. But his first irritation was succeeded by a sense of poignant anticipation. It would be good to have the coffeepot already steaming over the brush fire and smell the bacon drippings in the frying pan. It would be pleasant, too, to stretch out in the gray-green coolness of the willow trees and ruminate over a pipe with the genial putterings of old Jim Bledsoe within sight and earshot. Some folks would have scorned the meagre delights of this particular camp site, but Hank Wheelock always had argued that it served admirably. Where else for upward of a hundred miles could one have found a railroad water tank

dripping moisture and within striking distance of wooded mountain or sunburnt mesa, depending on one's direction and inclination? There was greenery enough and outlook enough and solitude enough; and, plus all that, an extraordinary sense of contact with life in just the fact of that ribbon of steel rails bearing thirsty engines to their slaking. A drowsy place, to be precise, as a camp site should be. . . . But it wouldn't stay drowsy for ever, not with Hank Wheelock's borax marshes twelve hours distant by foot trail. *Hank Wheelock's* borax marshes, mark you—not the borax marshes of *Bledsoe* and *Wheelock*! . . . The railroad siding would have a name, too—*Wheelock's Junction*. How did that sound? And, in a faint mirage, instead of a captured water-course coaxing willows to moist pasturage, he saw rise before him a dust-stung town at once clamorous and unlovely. Thus, midway, between chuckling satisfaction and a vague regret, he bore down upon *Jim Bledsoe* fanning a reluctant fire in the early morning light.

They greeted each other with clipped masculine monosyllables and lapsed speedily into the grateful silence of long association. As *Wheelock* had guessed, fish *had* been flashing in the sunlight of *Heron Creek*, for above the inevitable pungence of coffee and warming bacon grease there rose the sweetish odour of trout browning to a turn. . . . The meal ended, two pipes sent out the villainous perfumes of male contentment, and *Jim Bledsoe*, turning his faded blue eyes upon his partner, said:

"How'd things turn out back of *Antelope*?"

Hank Wheelock pulled up to the bitter task before him.

"They didn't. . . . I got to thinking things over on the way back: *Jim Bledsoe*, we ain't gettin' nowhere."

The blue eyes continued to stare at *Hank Wheelock* with bland tolerance. "Wal, if yer mean we can't just see the end of the trail, I'll allow that. . . . It's the bends in the roads yer can't look past that makes our game interesting. Leastways, that's my notion."

Hank Wheelock stirred the ashes in his pipe with a burnt match. "You always was a dreamer, *Jim Bledsoe*," he said, with a faint note of scorn. "Mebbe I was one, too, way back. . . . But I've passed too many of them bends

yer talk so much about. That's all they are—bends. One's just like another—more t'other side—that's all. And it gits narrower and narrower all the time, harder to do in double harness. . . . I come to the conclusion last night that after a while it's safer to make the grade single file."

He didn't look at Jim Bledsoe when he said this; he didn't have to—the long silence that followed told him that his shaft had struck home.

"Yer mean yer want to break the partnership?"

"I was thinking of it."

"Pshaw . . . not now, Hank—not after nigh on to forty years."

"That's just it—forty years! . . . Forty years turning them bends in the road yer talk so much about." Hank Wheelock's voice rose with a sort of desperate vehemence. "We've just been dead weight to each other, somehow. . . . You'll say, 'Wait for the next turn!' I know what's beyond *that*—the poorhouse!"

A look of bewilderment crept into Jim Bledsoe's glance. "You're wrong there, Hank. I ain't said nothin', I was just waitin' to surprise yer, but up Heron Falls way there's a prospect that——"

A low guttural laugh, two-edged with contempt, sent Jim Bledsoe's revelation scattering.

"Prospects—up by Heron Falls! . . . I guess a mess of fish now and then's about all yer'll ever take out of *that* country! . . . I heerd tell of your prospects before!"

Jim Bledsoe fumbled for his tobacco pouch, and his hand shook. "Yer right, Hank Wheelock," he said, in a voice that was much too high and clear and confident. "It's *time* you and me was quittin'."

Jim Bledsoe spoke to him once more—after the evening meal. He came and stood close to where Hank lay sprawled before the camp fire. He was ready for the trail—blanket roll, canteen, and canvas bag snug with essentials.

"I'm going over to Heron Falls," he said, without rancour, "and after that I'll drop down into Potterville. . . . Ain't nuthin' I can do for yer down that way, is there?"

Hank Wheelock stirred himself to a sitting posture. "How soon yer coming back?"

"I ain't coming back—leastways not the way I'm figgerin' now. . . . I'll stick to the timber fur a while. . . . I've had enough of this here alkali country."

Hank came to his feet. "How about dividin' things up?"

Jim Bledsoe swept the issue aside with a gesture of indifference. "Ain't much to divvy, is there? A few camp contraptions and a pack animal. I figgered you'd need 'em more than me. I won't be runnin' wild much longer."

His voice was untinged with patronage, yet his words brought the blood to Hank Wheelock's forehead. "I'd rather we cleaned up right!" he threw back, savagely.

Jim Bledsoe shrugged. "I've got all the best of it *now!*" he answered.

Hank Wheelock twisted his lips into a smile. "Well, if you're satisfied . . ." he said.

Their hands came together instinctively.

"Good luck!"

"Good luck!"

The sound of old Jim Bledsoe shuffling into the darkness . . . wind drawing up the mesa . . . the piercing wail of a coyote. . . . *After forty years!* . . .

He lay all night beside the camp fire, gazing up at the stars. An extraordinary sense of freedom possessed him. He had no one to answer to now except God, and His outline had grown too vague to throw any shadow. Curious how irksome a human relationship could become! Not that old Jim Bledsoe ever meddled, but he was always there, an unescapable fact to be reckoned with. After all, what had happened was inevitable. The surprising thing was that it had been delayed so long. Jim Bledsoe would be happier—he'd be free to loaf in the timber now, undisturbed by the clatter of achievement. Bledsoe was never a man to face facts, anyway. He was always veiling his passion for the soft seductions of the stream and forest in a pretence of prospecting. He'd have no place in wresting a fortune from the desert. *Tired of the alkali country*—that's the way he put it. Well, let him dream awhile longer over his trout stream! Hank Wheelock would show him; Hank Wheelock would give him a taste of real generosity! There wasn't anything he wouldn't do for his old partner, short of letting him have a hand in his

enterprise. A lovable old wastrel, this Jim Bledsoe, Hank Wheelock conceded. Take such an issue as dividing up, for instance. It was characteristic, this yielding everything, even the pack animal. If it hadn't been that he could repay this gesture tenfold, Hank Wheelock would have stuck to his first protest. Perhaps he should have, anyway. What if Jim Bledsoe were one day to say:

"Hank Wheelock ain't done nuthin' more'n he should. Didn't I turn over the whole shebang to him—pack mule and all, just before he struck it rich?"

Oh, well, if it gave Jim Bledsoe any satisfaction! . . . He'd likely find some excuse to horn in on the deal. Folks were like that—unwilling to concede unalloyed liberality.

After all, the camp equipment and the pack animal did mean something at this stage. He'd have a bit of travelling about to do. To begin with, he'd have to go into Potterville to attend to a thousand legal details, after he had staked his claim properly. He'd have to look people up, talk to them, get their interest. Yesterday, under the spell of his outstanding discovery, he had thought in terms of quickly matured plans; he saw now that weeks, months must elapse before they would swing forward. And he'd need a handful of money for the preliminaries, too. If the country back of Antelope had only yielded a decent pocket of ore! Perhaps if he pushed on a little farther. He knew a huddle of hills just beyond Mesquite Ridge that he had always thought of as promising.

He decided to start at daybreak. A fever of anxiety suddenly swept him. With the postponement of his triumph came a sickening fear that he had over-estimated the whole circumstance. What if the outcropping he had come upon were just that and nothing more? If veins of gold could swell deceitfully on the surface and peter out, why couldn't borax do the same? It wasn't likely, leastways he'd never heard of it, but it might! One always thought of borax marshes as the dried beds of inland seas, but he supposed they could be as easily the wash of prehistoric puddles. But it wasn't likely, he repeated again and again.

But even as he reassured himself a more fantastic idea consumed him. Could it be possible that the whole thing was a mental fabrication? Was the first suspicion which

had swept him as he bent over that patch of unexpected whiteness the right one? He had fancied then that the heat had touched him. Suddenly the canvas of his memory became crowded with brief hallucinations that had been the portion of desert rovers. The visions they had testified to!—incredible, alluring, ridiculous visions! He remembered them all, every one, with diabolical clearness.

His first plan had been to achieve Mesquite Ridge by a direct route that would have struck a little north of his discovery of yesterday, missing it by a half day's journey. There hadn't seemed any necessity for going out of his way merely to view a spot that he had quitted not twenty-four hours since. It would still be there, no matter what happened, and time was precious. But now, shaken by cold gusts of incredulity, he decided to take the longer route. He wanted to rest a moment in the shelter of that little mound of rock, and test once again with his fingers the reality of that sun-bleached pool that had so captured his fancy.

He broke camp without waiting for the sun to rise. Everything he possessed was loaded upon the protesting burro. His return was problematical. If he found that he *had* been snared by a vision, why——

But he refused to consider seriously such a contingency. Yet as he swung his footsteps eastward he had a sense of sickening dread that he could not define.

Toward evening the jutting ledge of rock which marked Hank Wheelock's spot of promise swam in the haze of a slanting sun. For a moment he leaned upon his rifle, motionless. The pack animal halted, too, making an inanimate outline against the sky. A thin curl of smoke drew upward in a straight line and mysteriously lost itself. . . . His first thought marked it as the camp fire of Indians. He felt annoyed. He had counted on solitude, and a brood of Indians was not to his liking. The alternative was even more distasteful: a white man would insist on chattering. . . . *A white man!* Had somebody already jumped his claim?

He felt wrath pounding at his temples, and, suddenly, instinctively, he began to run forward, his gun glistening with flashing menace. A figure scrambled from the sands to meet him.

"Wal, stranger, what's the hurry? . . . Don't yer calculate to stop at no flag stations?"

Hank Wheelock fell back. "I was all-fired thirsty!" he lied, conscious of two eyes riveted upon a thin trickle of moisture issuing from his canteen.

"Which way yer headed for?"

"Over by Mesquite Ridge."

"Prospectin'?"

"Yep."

Hank Wheelock shuffled to the water hole and bent over. "Which way *you* goin'?" he shot out, putting his lips to the moisture in his cupped palm.

The stranger stirred his miniature camp fire.

"I ain't made up my mind," he announced, with a cryptic chuckle.

Hank eyed his man grimly, but he had wit enough to lapse almost at once into a show of indifference. He straightened up slowly, casting his glance in the direction of the thing that he had travelled all day in the blistering heat to confirm. If he were mad before, his mind was still touched—the outcropping of borax glistened even in the twilight with emphatic whiteness. The stranger was bending over the fire. A primitive gust swept Hank Wheelock: he grasped his gun securely, but the next instant relaxed his grip, shaken further by the realization that he could turn yellow even for so brief a moment. The man had risen.

"Wal," he drawled, "I expect it's about time to chew!"

Hank wiped the sweat from his eyes, accepting the stranger's implied invitation with equal indirection, as he said:

"I guess I'd better unpack that fool burro if we calc'late to eat without jackass music."

The stranger's name was Starbuck—a garrulous, cynical soldier of fortune with the gossip of boom town and mining camp and trail bubbling up unceasingly. He had inside stories of clean-ups and collapses, and racy anecdotes of prominent citizens grown suddenly respectable overnight by the magic of money, or old age, or pure expediency. Listening to the suave ripple of incidents flowing from his lips, Hank Wheelock grew profoundly irritated. Here was a man that one felt knew too much, whose grasp of the inconsequential

seemed vaguely significant, with a chuckling humour capable of diabolical disillusionments. . . . For Hank Wheelock was still a childlike soul in spite of his worldly contacts—a man with enough buoyancy of spirit to be forced upward instead of swamped by the ugly currents of life.

This man Starbuck was sly, too; one got that in his half-closed glance, and there was something in the curve of his lip which seemed pregnant with ridicule. Hank Wheelock was burning to know whether thirst was the only thing that had lured him to this water hole, and having slaked it, what held him there. Surely he had experience enough to know borax when he saw it. Yet on this significant point he was strangely silent. . . . No, not strangely, when Hank came to think of it. Being no doubt possessed of the secret, Starbuck was as intent on guarding it as Hank himself.

Hank ate sparingly of Starbuck's bacon and beans, keeping his gun within easy reach. The impulse toward cold-blooded murder which had seized him earlier had vanished utterly, but he was ready this time for a fair fight, if he felt himself forced to it. He had rights which he was prepared to defend, and the thought thrilled him.

He tried discreetly once or twice to force Starbuck's vapourings into significant channels when suddenly, without warning, Starbuck himself rippled toward the desired explanation of his presence. They had finished their meal and their first pipes when Starbuck began to pack his mess kit with slow deliberation.

"Might as well be ready to move when I take the notion," he said.

Wheelock's heel dug into the sand. "What's your hurry?"

"Hurry? . . . No, I ain't exactly in a hurry. . . . But I jest swung a few miles out o' my course to-day to have a look at this here spot. Things on the desert stay pretty much as they were at the start. It's bin twenty years or more since I come by here."

"And yer mean ter say yer found nuthin' changed—*nuthin'?*"

"Not a damned thing!" He threw a greasewood twig in the direction of one of the piles of rock with which Hank Wheelock fantastically had staked his claim. "Excepting

them fool monuments!" He gave a chuckle. "When I seen them I looked around for a skeleton or two. Sez I to myself: 'Bud Starbuck, nobody but a tenderfoot done anything *that* foolish.'"

Hank Wheelock felt his face dyed slowly with a flush midway between anger and confusion. Could it be possible that this man suspected who was responsible for this futile and childish performance? He slapped his thigh ruminatingly, trying to frame a disarming reply.

"No, nuthin' changed in twenty years," he heard Starbuck drone on, "excepting them fool monuments and the sand shifting back and forth. . . . Now in the timber country you'd find trees growed bigger, or split by lightning, or mebbe a creek bed widened. But *here!*" He threw his shoulders upward with a lift of lively disgust.

A strange dryness puckered Hank Wheelock's lips—something like premonition urged him to complete silence, as if such a course might check the flow of Starbuck's speech, and yet he found himself saying almost hoarsely:

"How'd yer come to think o' stopping at all? . . . Ain't nuthin' here so all-fired unusual! . . . Leastways, nuthin' that would make a man remember that fur back."

"Wal, mebbe you'd think different if you'd drove a mule team past this water hole twice a week or more for nigh on to a year like I did. . . . Yes, sir, I passed this place more times than I could shake a stick at back in them days when I was hauling borax out o' Paiute Valley."

Hank Wheelock bent forward suddenly. "Borax!" he echoed faintly.

"Yes siree, borax. . . . He picked up another twig and hurled it this time in the midst of the crystalline pool, upon which Hank Wheelock was gazing with tragic uncertainty. "Yer see that? . . . Would yer like to know something about how it come there? Well, listen ter me, stranger, and when I get through if yer don't agree that nuthin' ever changes in this fool country, my name won't be Bud Starbuck!"

Some time in the night with the rising moon, Hank Wheelock heard the clinking of a mess kit swaying rhythmically, and he knew that Starbuck had hit the trail again. He *was*

wide awake, but he did not stir; he did not even call out a farewell: he had had enough of Bud Starbuck. It was not so much that this man had robbed him of an illusion as that he had convicted him of idiocy. Fancy a seasoned prospector letting himself be snared by anything so obviously fictitious as this outcropping of borax! What could he have been thinking of! After all, he hadn't made a fool of himself to Jim Bledsoe—his humiliation, bitter as it was, would at least always be self-contained. . . . Unless Bud Starbuck suspected! . . . And there were moments when Hank Wheelock fancied that he did.

He had told his story with suspicious gusto, as if he were inwardly smiling, and at the end his "I'd like ter clap my eyes on the greenhorn that reared up them there stone monuments" had been significant with contempt. The very memory of it still made Hank Wheelock wince.

It was a well-told tale and the element of extravagance was in it despite its underlying triteness. Bud Starbuck had the gift of vitalizing his narrative, and Hank Wheelock had been captured at once by the picture of the narrator setting out with his mule team on a wind-swept morning twenty years before to haul borax from Paiute Valley to the railroad siding. A fool thing to do in such a sandstorm, according to Starbuck's own statement! But bravado lay back of it, an answer to a carelessly flung challenge, with a wager to add zest to the performance—some fifty dollars for the delivery within a given time of the load at its destination. A hard-fought battle through blinding wind and sand, with a snapped axle almost within sight of victory. Then the load dumped in a little saucer-like depression near the water hole, the maimed wagon trailing to shelter behind staggering mules like some wounded animal dragged unwittingly to slaughter. Next day rehabilitation and the mules trotting back with their rattling "empty" and Bud Starbuck intent on plans for salvaging the abandoned load.

And the finish—to quote Bud Starbuck himself:

"Covered up jest as clean as if some fool grave-digger had been at work. . . . I'd 'lowed that there ledge of rock would shunt off the whirling sand. But no siree, it jest jumped *that*—as pretty. . . . Yes, stranger, the sand's the only thing changes in this dern country, and then it just

skips about like grasshoppers. . . . That borax has bin there nigh on to twenty years—jest waiting fer another fool wind to uncover it. . . . And I'm willing to bet if I was to load that up again, it wouldn't be ten pounds lighter—no siree, not ten pounds!"

Could any tale have been more commonplace, more ridiculous, more extravagant, all in one breath? It was so obvious and simple, once it was told. . . . Why, Hank Wheelock didn't have to so much as look again to realize how shallow and artificial and altogether unconvincing of promise was this little glistening patch of crystal winking its thousand eyes mockingly in the sunlight. . . . What was Jim Bledsoe doing up by Heron Falls?—gentle, kindly, simple Jim Bledsoe. . . . If he might only wake to-morrow to the sizzling of bacon in the pan and the sweetish smell of trout browning to a turn! . . .

He lay all the next day in the imperfect shadow of the ledge of rock watching the buzzards circling overhead. At intervals he ministered to the thirsty needs of his pack animal with patient scooping of moisture from the water hole, but for himself, he was content to drowse in a feverish retrospection. . . . Nightfall . . . another day . . . a procession of sunsets and dawns. . . . He was tired—that was it—all-fired tired! To-morrow he would start in the direction of Mesquite Ridge, but not to-day! . . . Again and again he dulled the faint urge within him with this promise, and as often let it be strangled slowly by inaction. Overhead the buzzards grew into a black and menacing cloud. . . . Well, they screened the sun, anyway, he would mutter, closing his eyes. The pack animal brayed pitifully! What did it matter? . . . He would start to-morrow! And thus one day merged into another without circumstance or change or human visitation, until in the faint flush of a wind-blown dawn he saw the figure of old Jim Bledsoe drifting forward in a gilded haze.

Jim Bledsoe's bacon and coffee had never tasted so good. They were like a miraculous sacrament that could revive the spirit as well as the body. With every gulp of muddy coffee, Hank Wheelock could feel the sense of proportion and reality return. But above the physical content which

was stealing over him there rose a suspicion of Jim Bledsoe's presence, a premonition that this old partner of his had sought him out deliberately for some sly purpose he could not define. It all came out, finally, at the appointed time for men's revelations—over the inevitable and pungent pipes. It was Jim Bledsoe who opened fire.

"I warn't at all sure I'd ketch yer," he broke out, suddenly, without warning.

"How'd yer know I was here?"

"I met a man working up toward Windgate—Bud Starbuck. He said he'd seen yer. . . . But he 'lowed you'd be headin' for Mesquite by this time. . . . But, I dunno, somethin' seemed to tell me you was right here. . . . O' course, I could have waited at camp, but things looked so sort of cleaned-out there—as if you'd bolted fer a spell. . . . I jest couldn't sit there and wait, so I sez to myself: 'If he ain't at that there water hole, I'll follow him up.'"

Hank Wheelock felt the necessity for explanation. "I was aimin' to leave to-day. . . . Somethin' I eat must have put me off my feed. I jest felt all-fired ornery. . . . Were yer calculatin' to swing over to Mesquite with me?"

Jim Bledsoe shook his head and a little gurgling note of triumph issued from his throat.

"No, siree, not me. 'Twarn't for that reason I trotted after yer. . . . But I was jest like a fool woman—bustin' to tell yer the news. . . ." He cleared his throat. "Hank Wheelock, you and me don't have to go traipsin' around this here alkali no more, tryin' to hog-tie fortune. I struck somethin' up in that Heron Falls country jest like I said I would. . . . Oh, it ain't nuthin' suddin—I've bin flirting round with it fer nigh on to six months, now. . . . Yes, siree, fishing ain't the only thing I done up there. . . . I jest laid low and said nuthin', working it all up on the sly. . . . Well, I got a man ready to give me a quarter of a million ter hand over my option. . . . O' course, he'll pull out ten times that. . . . But I figgered you and me couldn't spend much more'n he offered before we cashed in." He gave a chuckle. "Leastways, not onless we got a couple of gals to give us a hand."

Hank Wheelock drew viciously on his pipe. A quarter of a million! . . . Old Jim Bledsoe! It was incredible!

But more incredible still was the simplicity of including a partner who had so unceremoniously cut adrift from him. Hank had no words of gratitude to meet such a situation, so instead he found himself saying, with almost a sneer:

"I don't see where *I* come in, *now!*"

"Say, yer don't think fer one moment, Hank Wheelock, I'd hold out on yer jest because yer kicked over the traces once in forty years? I'll allow I was sore—at furst! . . . But, pshaw, it ain't as if you and me was strangers. . . . Besides, I know what you'd ha' done if you'd bin in my place!"

A flush spread over Hank Wheelock's face: the sort of flush that used to rise when as a boy his mother had imputed undeserved virtues to him. A sudden and secret shame overwhelmed him, and the bitter truth rose perversely to his lips.

"Oh, yer do, do yer!" he sneered. "Well, let me tell yer one thing, yer wrong! . . . If you'd ditched me, Jim Bledsoe, I'd ha' let yer starve—that's what I'd ha' done!"

He stopped, amazed at the lengths to which his self-contempt had swung him. In the stillness that followed he had a sense that he was hanging upon Jim Bledsoe's reply with drowning desperation.

Jim Bledsoe shook his head. "Yer don't have to tell me, Hank Wheelock—I know what I'm talking about!"

For a moment the feeling of relief which swept him was almost painful. It wasn't any use telling Jim Bledsoe the truth. Why bother, then? What folks didn't know wouldn't sicken them. He might just as well share in the prospects. *A quarter of a million!* At last he could take it easy!

But this gust of satisfaction passed swiftly and left him as chilled as when he had stood, with his finger on the trigger of his gun, watching Starbuck bending over the fire. . . . No, it couldn't be done: it wasn't sporting! He'd been a gambler all his life and he'd made mistakes, but he'd never cheated. He couldn't horn in on a game he'd dropped out of; he couldn't keep on playing when he knew that there had been a misdeal. A passed hand was a passed hand. And a dissolved partnership was *dissolved*: there wasn't nothing else to it. Besides, a man had his pride. *He* wasn't no

beggar! . . . He wasn't dead yet, neither, and there were just as good claims in the hills as ever were dug.

He scrambled to his feet and he knew that his voice was clear and cold and triumphant as he lied:

"Wal, I've got some news fer you, too. . . . You ain't the only one's bin working on the sly. . . . I got some-thin' pretty nice staked out over in that Mesquite Range. . . . It won't be a quarter of a million, but it will be enough—fer me!"

Jim Bledsoe rose more slowly. "Jest as you say. . . . But I don't feel comfortable, somehow. . . . We was partners, yer know, when I fust came on to that holdin'. I should have told yer right off."

A hot breeze began to catch up little whirls of sand and loose the pungent odours of the sagebrush. An intolerable longing for some far-off and dusky coolness oppressed Hank Wheelock. He thought of hedgerows and columbine and hollyhocks and the faint tinkle of silver fountains.

"Yes, siree!" he heard Jim Bledsoe repeating, in a tone of self-rebuke. "I should have told you right off!"

Hank Wheelock turned his face upward to the lifted circle of buzzards wheeling expectantly in the turquoise expanse. A flicker of indecision sputtered and died. He nodded in the direction of the Mesquite Range and his voice shook with the triumph of a gambler who scorned a secret advantage as he said:

"That's my case, exactly! . . . Yer see—it's jest horse and horse!"

PROFESSOR BOYNTON REREADS HISTORY

By EDITH R. MIRRIELES

From Atlantic Monthly

AT TEN minutes before twelve, according to his daily custom, Professor Boynton got up from his study table, stretched his arms vigorously once or twice above his early gray head, and strolled out through the open door of his study to the veranda. At its farther end his daughter Helen was sitting between two of her high-school classmates, all three surrounded by a sea of books and notebooks and scattered papers.

"Why didn't you ever have me learn any history when I was little, Father?" she reproached him, as he came up the porch. "When you used to teach it——"

Boynton let himself down into the hammock behind her. "Probably that's why. Whether you teach it or whether you write it, you find out how much of it isn't so. What's the examination this time?"

"She isn't giving an examination; it's a question we're to write on for Monday. 'In your opinion, what has Magna Carta given to West Brookins?' She means, what's lasted that we get out of it."

"She's chosen a good place to put the question," Boynton commented. "Now if she were teaching in San Francisco, and trying to find what fragments they still had—— What are you deciding?"

"We haven't finished yet, but there are three things—— What is it, Mother?"

Mrs. Boynton had been putting last touches on the lunch table inside. She came to the door now.

'Nothing. Only I wanted to tell your father something.

Edward—Parker hasn't done a thing toward getting that wall down. He came over to say Mrs. Parker was sick and he couldn't. Mrs. Thornley says they were chasing each other around and screaming half the night, last night."

"Where on earth do they get it?" Boynton wondered, briefly. "Sick" for the Parkers had a definite meaning. "I thought she was sent up for a cure of some kind last month?"

"I thought so, too, but she got off. But what I started to say was this: he went out through the back entry, and when I looked, your garden coat was gone. He was the only person here."

"I'll kill that old scoundrel one of these days," Boynton threatened, more amused than angry. "I like that coat. I wonder if Thornley'd mind getting it back for me."

He went in to the telephone and found the number.

"Thornley? This is Boynton speaking. Thornley, Parker stole a coat from me this morning. A brown one. . . . Yes. Yes, I knew they'd been at it again. Mrs. Thornley told us. If he's over there working on your lawn, I wonder if you'd mind telling him to leave the coat there till I can get it? He can't have had time to do anything with it yet. And you might mention to him, too, that if he sets foot on my place again, I'll save expense and shoot him on sight. Last time it was my best trowel. . . . Oh, over in Brookins, I suppose. You know what law enforcement amounts to over there. . . . Yes, she's worse than he is."

He came back laughing to the porch.

"Now, there's a question, Helen, that Magna Carta didn't settle. When it comes to a town like this, 90 per cent. of it law-abiding, home-owning professionals, having to stagger along with neighbours like the Parkers—— You young people staying to lunch?"

They were near the end of the meal when Mrs. Boynton, who was facing the open door, motioned through it.

"Look, Edward! It's both of them."

Outside, the two Parkers, the official derelicts of West Brookins, were coming waveringly along the pavement, arm in arm. Three or four small boys derided safely from a distance.

It was the boys Boynton saw first. He got up instantly.

"Oh, come, we can't have that! Why, he's a man as old as I am! She's going round to the back, Cara. You head her off and I'll go down and speak to him."

Parker had turned in behind the hedge with which the Boyntons were replacing a partly torn down brick wall. Behind it, he was out of sight from the house, and remembering the three girls at the table, Boynton hurried, with the charitable purpose of saving him the embarrassment of an audience.

"Where's that coat, Parker?" he demanded, as he came into hearing.

"What coat, Mr. Boynton?"

"Now, look here," Boynton ordered, with exasperation, "you know what coat as well as I do. Haven't you just come from Thornley's? Didn't he tell you I said I'd finish you if you came near this place again without bringing it back? If you haven't it——"

"I don't know about no coat, Mr. Boynton. I don't know what you're talking about. Mr. Thornley, he come out an' said somethin', but I didn't know——"

The sentence went unfinished. Boynton, facing the speaker from the other side of the pile of bricks, had turned his eyes away in a sort of vicarious shame at his protestations. As the words broke off, he was conscious of something, he hardly knew what—a kind of concussion, a sense of violent disturbance to which there was yet attached no movement. The man in front of him flung up his hands with a choking grunt and crumpled forward. Instinctively, Boynton caught at him as he fell, but he broke through his hold, a dead weight, and dropped across the bricks. On Boynton's hands and his cuffs blood had flicked itself in sickening red blots. The still sunny lane, with its signs of peaceable labour, was suddenly a place of horror.

And then at once the stillness was broken. Mrs. Parker rushed round the end of the hedge. She threw herself on the thing on the ground, howling and wailing, pulling at it, grotesque, unhuman. Mrs. Boynton had run out, too, and Helen and her friends, and two men from the street, and Boynton knew that he must have cried out, though he had not meant to do so.

The two men dragged Mrs. Parker up and bent over the body. They babbled together of a doctor, though all of them knew in advance that the thing on the ground was dead. Nothing living could have had that look. In the press and sudden confusion Mrs. Boynton was the only one who had a definite intention. She caught hold of Boynton's sleeve.

"Come into the house. They'll look out for things. You have to get—to get this off you."

She would have accompanied him into the bathroom, but he stopped her at the door. "I have to have a minute to pull myself together. I'll be down directly. What on earth was it that happened to him!"

Inside, he turned on all the taps. It seemed to him he could never get water enough on his hands. When his hands were clean he pulled off his cuffs and let them drop on the floor, and scrubbed his fingers again after touching them. He could not bear to put the befouled things into the laundry hamper, but with his foot he pushed them out of sight behind the tub.

By the time he came downstairs, the knot of people in the lane had disappeared. Mrs. Boynton was sitting on the porch, and Helen, with scared, reddened eyes, was leaning against her knees. Boynton had recovered enough to be paternal and soothing. He sat on the steps for a few minutes, talking over the grotesque tragedy.

"Poor old soul, I wish I hadn't harried him about that coat. He was always honest enough when we was sober. They've taken him to the morgue, I suppose?— Well, we'd better get back to work, hadn't we, little daughter? There's no advantage to him in our spoiling an afternoon."

Inside his study his mind refused to apply itself to work. In spite of him, it flashed back again and again to that minute in the lane. He got up and walked up and down the room, puzzling. "What happened to him? What on earth happened to him?" Toward the middle of the afternoon, when he heard a masculine voice answering Mrs. Boynton's, he took advantage of hearing to stroll out from his seclusion. Their next-door neighbour, Judge Bolling—a judge long since retired—was filling one of the porch chairs. Boynton greeted him briefly.

"Oh, yes, I'm working, but I heard you out here, and I was wondering—Cara, I suppose somebody's looking out for Mrs. Parker? She wouldn't have many friends to fall back on."

"They took her to the hospital."

"That's good. If you think one of us ought to go over——"

"I don't." Mrs. Boynton flushed crimson as she spoke. "I've heard from her. Edward, she—she's——"

"Might as well say it, Cara," the judge advised. He turned round, laughing.

"You ought to know, Boynton, you're hovering on the edge of the gallows. I was telling Cara just before you came out. Mrs. Parker——"

Mrs. Boynton cut in on the sentence. "She says she heard you say, 'I told you I'd finish you if you came on my place,' and then——"

"Why, yes. Yes, that's what I did say," Boynton corroborated. He grasped the other part of the idea slowly. "Do you mean she has the effrontery—the—the assurance——"

Their guest laughed again, more reassuringly than before. "She's still two thirds over. Wait till we see what she says when she's sober.—Funny thing is, what was the matter with him? Do you suppose one of those boys who were following——"

"I haven't the smallest idea. I'd think he had a fit and struck his head when he fell, only I saw the blood before that. I tried to catch him, and it was all over me."

"If I were you, I'd forget about seeing it beforehand," the ex-judge suggested, casually.

He had been gone an hour or two and it was nearly dinner time before the force of his suggestion struck home to Boynton's mind. He commented on it indignantly to his wife and daughter while they ate.

"A man like Bolling, too! That's the worst of having anything to do with the courts, even as far up as he was. I've never had to testify at an inquest, and naturally I've always kept clear of getting on juries or anything of that kind; but as to using any subterfuge to get out of testifying——"

By the next morning, though, his attention had been diverted to newer reasons for indignation. Mrs. Parker was still too ill to leave her bed, and the inquest was being postponed for her, but her pre-inquest statements, as they seeped

out by way of hospital attendants and doctors, were voluminous. She had heard the damning words, she had seen the brick picked up, the blow struck. She breathed out fire and threatenings between relapses into post-alcoholic grief. The news of her accusations was all over West Brookins. From early breakfast-time the Boynton telephone rang continually as prelude to messages satirical or humorous. Even families in Brookins, the town to which West Brookins was a remote and superior suburb, had heard and added their messages to the nearer ones. Boynton, going out to the box to mail a letter in the middle of the morning, found Mrs. Boynton waiting in the study for him when he came back.

"I don't know whether you'll like it, Edward; I've just had a 'phone from Charlie."

"If I don't like it, I suppose you won't have had it. What does Charlie have to say? Offer to defend me?"

"Something like that. He said he was coming down as soon as he could get out of court, and—and to keep you from talking."

"To *keep* me from it?"

"That's what it sounded like. The 'phone wasn't working very well."

"That's probably what it was," Boynton agreed. "It has the ring of Charlie's advice. Well, run along, dear, and I'll get back to writing. Let me know if he favours us with any more suggestions."

Inwardly, though, he was pleased. Charlie was his younger brother and in a mild way the black sheep of the family. That is, he had given up an irreproachable law practice in Los Angeles for the sake of criminal practice in San Francisco, and had added to that the extra offence of taking a somewhat holier-than-thou attitude over the change.

"It'll be good for him," Poynton mused, while he glanced over the notes on his desk. "To come racing down and find us all going about our business—— It's what I've tried to tell him about those clients of his he gets so excited over. If a man lives in a decent place and leads a decent life, he's out of reach of accidents. Now with me——"

He let his mind go, house by house, down the street. There were people he disliked in some of the houses, people no doubt who disliked him; but there was not one house of them all—

he knew it perfectly—in which the ravings of Mrs. Parker could meet with any reception except indignant incredulity.

It was pleasant, though, all the same, that the telephone kept up its friendly clamour, that Mrs. Boynton on the porch was holding what amounted to an impromptu reception. Two or three times Boynton strolled out to add his greetings to his wife's.

"To let you see the villain of the piece," he explained his coming. He was good-humouredly qualified in his comments on Mrs. Parker. "Poor old wreck! In her condition no telling what she would see! No, I don't blame her; the people I do blame are the town authorities. A little more sense of responsibility on their part——"

Charlie arrived just before dinner, a smaller man than his brother—hawk-nosed, black-haired. Through the meal they kept chiefly to family topics. Even in the study afterward the newcomer fended off discussion until Mrs. Boynton, leaning forward in her chair, taxed him directly:

"Is it Helen and I that are the difficulty, Charlie? Would you rather talk to Edward by himself?"

He gave her his first unqualified smile. "Could I? It's a sort of a professional prejudice of mine. You don't mind?"

He got up to open the door for her and came back from it to the fireplace, where he stood staring down at the logs.

"Well, what do you think, Sherlock?" Boynton challenged him.

"I think you're in a hole."

"Did you actually take it seriously enough to come down from San Francisco on account of this?"

"I did."

"Now that," Boynton commented, "is what criminal practice does for the mind. I might be in a hole if I were a tramp picked up on Pacific Street—I admit that; but here in West Brookins——"

"It's exactly that 'here in West Brookins' that worries me. Did you really tell the fellow you'd kill him?"

"Why, as far as that goes——"

"Did you or didn't you?"

Boynton got up, too. "Look here, I'm not on the witness

stand. If you've come down with any idea of cross examining me——"

"Oh, tell it your own way, Ed," the younger brother agreed, resignedly, and Boynton ran rapidly through the narrative of Parker's death. When he had finished, Charlie came back to his chair and sat down in the circle of light from the lamp, leaning his arms on the table.

"And you still don't think you're in a hole—after telling me all that?"

"I know I'm not."

"You said you'd kill him and said it in the presence of witnesses and repeated it over the telephone. Then you were alone with him when he dropped dead; his blood was all over you, and the widow——"

"Well, do you believe I did it?"

"That's not the question."

"It's exactly the question. I tell you, Charlie, you couldn't get any intelligent man in West Brookins—no, nor in Brookins, either, though it's not a place I'm fond of—to believe a thing like that. Not any more than you'd believe it yourself. The evidence wouldn't matter; they'd *know* it wasn't true."

"You couldn't get a change of venue?"

"There isn't any question of 'venue.' You talk as though I'd been held——"

His audience seemed not to hear. "I never lived in this particular town, of course, but most of them—— How big a place is it?"

"Three thousand, I believe—*West* Brookins, that is. Brookins is larger."

"That's about what I thought. See here; I knew exactly how you'd treat the thing—that's why I came down; but we've got to take it seriously. It *is* serious! Any lawyer'd tell you so. This business of being a valued old resident that you seem to be depending on to keep you out of trouble——"

"And that will!"

"Sure of it?"

"Of course I'm sure of it."

The questioner drew in a deep breath. "Well—maybe! But where do you get it, Ed?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"That 'first-citizen' stuff? Oh, I'm not trying to hurt your feelings. I'm trying to find out. What do you do in Brookins—I don't mean the United States; I mean right here in West Brookins—to keep them all so certain about you? Vote once in a while?"

"I always vote."

"I know you do—for President. Vote in the last town election?"

"I don't remember——"

"I remember all right—even if I wasn't here. You meant to and you thought you would and you didn't know anything about either of the candidates, and it looked like rain, and you sat right here and let 'em elect anybody they good and pleased; and now you'll get tried for murder by those same good and pleased parties."

Boynton laughed. It was an effort to do it, for he was angry, but he made the effort.

"It's a beautiful peroration, Charlie. It's a pity it's wasted. Even an ex-professor knows that town officials don't try for murder."

"Any idea who binds you over to the superior court? Oh, I don't say a police judge could help it on the evidence, but I do say he won't break his heart over it—not with one of the little high-and-mighties from West Brookins. If you think the cheapest skate there is likes being elected and run by the scum of a town—— Know any of the police judges?"

"I've never had occasion to."

"Or the town marshal? Or the coroner, for that matter? Then you don't know the kind of men you're up against. If you want my advice——"

"I seem to be getting it."

"You're going to get it. You won't take it, but you're going to get it, all right. If I were where you are, I'd do one of two things: either I'd get a theory about that killing and I'd work it for all it was worth, or else I'd get out. Nobody'd look very far for you."

"You mean—go into hiding?"

"It don't matter what you call it. Go on a visit if you want to. Just get out of the way for a while till there's time to look around. And do it now while you've the chance to do it."

"If your other clients——"

"I'm not helping you as a client; I'm helping you as a brother. I'm scared, Ed. That's the truth. If anything I can say can get you away——"

"It can't."

"I knew it," Charlie acknowledged, regretfully. "I hand it to you as far as that goes. That French-Revolution-Charles-the-First stunt is the one you first citizens always pull when you get into trouble. All right, that's ended—though I still hope you change your mind before morning. What about the widow? Young? Pretty? Well, I don't know which is worse—that, or old and feeble, prop of her declining years removed. You needn't laugh. If you'd had as much experience as I have——"

"You've had entirely too much, Charlie," Boynton agreed. This time his laughter was sincere. "You're trying the case down on Kearney Street. What you overlook is that, even if there should be some preliminary unpleasantness—I don't believe there will be—still, I have a safe resort. Nothing can go very far without being passed on by a jury. I know enough law for that."

"It's the jury you're depending on?"

"It's precisely that."

"You think if the widow took the stand and swore to what she'd heard you say, and cried and had hysterics——"

"I think it wouldn't make the slightest difference. I've lived here twelve years; any jury you could get, any dozen men picked at random——"

His brother repeated the words thoughtfully after him. "Any jury picked at random?' All right—we'll pick 'em; enough to show what I mean. Got a telephone book? It won't be a perfectly fair sample, but it'll give us an idea. Here, I'll read the names off."

He turned to the A's under West Brookins. "ABRAMS, ADAMS, ADAMSON——"

"There's a good place to stop," Boynton interrupted the reading. He spoke good-naturedly with an obvious desire not to insist on his triumph. "Any one of those three or all of them. Adams and I have played chess together for years. And Abrams——"

"Abrams the one that writes the law textbooks?"

"Yes. He was at the State University when I was, and ever since——"

"Ever serve on a jury yourself?"

"I'm exempt. As a teacher——"

"It's ten or twelve years since you did any teaching."

"Teaching is my profession, though, and naturally——"

He saw the application of the question and was silent.

"What does Adams do?"

"He's a doctor."

"That exempts him. Adamson?"

"He's retired now. He was formerly counsel——"

"Exempt, then."

He read off three more names. At the end of the next three he got up and moved his chair over to his brother's.

"It'll be quicker to run down the page and check the exceptions. Know AGNEW?—ALLEN, A. R.?—ALLEN, R. N.?—ALLIGER?"

"Alliger? I don't know any Alliger—— Oh, yes, he does odd jobs. He brought me some fertilizer once."

"And you probably objected to the price and he's had it in for you ever since. He'll be eligible—ALSBERG?"

They had turned one page and were halfway down the second before Boynton raised his head from above the book.

"I think we needn't go any farther. I think I see your point."

"Let's see what we've got, then: one odd-jobs man; one truck farmer—he may get off, it's just a chance if we get him; one garbage man's helper; one you don't know; one delivery-wagon driver—— What'd you say about him? I've got him checked twice."

"I said I'd asked Breck to discharge him because of the way he got orders mixed. If he isn't feeble-minded——"

"He won't be too feeble-minded to remember that—you can bank on his having that much mind; nor too feeble-minded to get accepted, either, so long as he's outside an institution. You see what it comes down to. That's what brought me down as fast as I could travel. I didn't know anything about this town, but I knew what towns full of retired lawyers and bankers and professors and cultured classes generally are always like. Look at Boston! Rottenest city government—— You wouldn't think now of what I said a

while ago about going off for a visit for a while? It's just till we'd have time to get our hands on some clues and get in first with them. When you're up against a combination like this——"

Professor Boynton got to his feet. His face was suddenly as old as his gray hair. He swallowed hard before he spoke.

"No," he said. He stood looking down into the fire. "It's Helen I'm thinking of, of course. She's just at that age—— But no! Whatever I've done——"

"But it's what you haven't done! Good God, Ed, if you'd done anything to him——"

"I don't mean that," Boynton said. For a little while he resumed his contemplation of the fire. "What I mean is this: all my life I've prided myself on being a good citizen. If I haven't been——" He paused. "Since I haven't been, to take the consequences of not being——"

"But you couldn't have turned the thing—not single-handed."

"I could have helped. In a place as small as this, if I'd set the example——" He stopped: the telephone, which had been quiet longer than at any other time in the day, was ringing again. "Cara's gone upstairs, I think. I'll answer it."

"I'll answer it! The less you talk, the better. If it's anybody trying to get a statement out of you——" He went out to the instrument. Inside the study, his brother could hear the quick bark of his responses.

"Hello. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . No, he can't come just now. This is his brother. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. *What!* . . . What's that? . . . Yes, I got you!"

There was a long listening silence. Then the receiver crashed down on the hook and Charlie came back into the study. His face was queerly mottled with red and his teeth ate at his unsteady lower lip.

"God's good to you, Ed! The widow got up when they weren't watching her and got hold of something she thought was whiskey. She's just made a statement in expectation of death. She threw the brick herself—came round from behind you. He'd been chasing her with a knife the night before and that was her answer. It was a Judge Somebody

telephoned. He said he and some of your other friends were coming over."

He stopped, waiting for his brother to answer, but Boynton said nothing.

"I think I'll duck out before they come. I've a meeting in town I oughtn't to cut if I can help it. . . . But I'm glad! You know that. I'm tickled to death. I could sit down and cry, just out of plain relief. You'll say good-bye to Cara for me, won't you? And the next time you get accused of murder or arson or kidnapping——"

But Professor Boynton, though he held his brother's hand longer than was usual with him, did not respond to the joking. When he was alone, he went to one of the bookcases and took down from it a little shabby brown-bound volume and turned its familiar leaves. The passage he turned to he could have repeated as well without the book as with it:

"No free man shall be taken or imprisoned or dispossessed, or outlawed, or banished, or in any way destroyed; nor will we go upon him, nor send upon him, except by the legal judgment of his peers. . . ."

The telephone book was still open on the desk. His eyes went from the page in front of him to the checked names on its list—to the names of the garbage man and the odd-jobs man and the driver of the delivery wagon.

"His peers!" Boynton quoted under his breath. "'By legal judgment of [my] peers.'" The colour flooded his face, even to his rim of gray hair. "My superiors! The men I've left alone at Runnymede!"

He was still holding the book between his fingers when the doorbell sounded and he went out to let in his other peers—the recreant barons of West Brookins.

THE SECRET AT THE CROSS-ROADS

BY JEFFERSON MOSLEY

From *Forum*

IT WAS late in August. I had been attached to the General Medical Foundation since my professional graduation in June of the preceding year and was now on my way to a remote settlement known as Bell's Brake, where I was to continue my monotonous and personally distasteful routine of hookworm investigations. The inspiration of the physician's ideal seemed far-fetched to me that day, and its forlorn drudgeries their own reward.

Bell's Brake lies twenty miles west of Dalby, the nearest railway stop. At Dalby I hired horse and vehicle for ten days and set out across country according to schedule.

It was a hot, sandy plod all the afternoon, through typical bottom country, forest spaces alternating with rail-fenced corn and cotton clearings, and the light of other days broke on me in the colour, odour, and grand passiveness of it all. South is South, and emotionally I was in the heart of home. Nevertheless, I was a casual and transient through the particular region, and loneliness for things vanished took possession of me. I was jaded from long travel.

The accident that befell me about eight miles from Bell's was nothing extraordinary, but it brought on a futile delay. The rack-boned horse quietly pulled the swingletree in two, and I found myself without the means to repair. At last, however, an old Negro drove up in a tottering buckboard. He had a half roll of cotton bagging with him, and from the cordage around this and a hickory pole I had cut he accommodated me with an African's best splice. After losing a full hour I got under way again, precariously. It was nearing six

o'clock, and the sun was sinking. I wondered where I should be at midnight.

There is a curve in the road just before you reach the fork, five miles this side of Bell's. On the left is an undefined area of land once cleared but now run wild again, save for a clump of four or five half-tended graves. On the right stands a grove of live oaks, perfect of its kind. A swampy "branch" flows through it, leading the eye back into vistas of semi-gloom. The oaks spread their elephantine limbs wide and low, and the sluggish waters mirror long festoons of moss and muscadine. Frogs were beginning to chirp and grunt as I drove past, and spirals of mosquitoes were drifting out. A specimen of *culex pipiens* found me and wailed indefinitely in my ear.

But habitation of some sort met my eyes just around the turn. Nearest me suddenly appeared a group of outhouses, at the farther end of which was a larger unpainted board structure—a store, it seemed, with gable and porch facing the road. Just beyond, the fork branched off, past that, woods again. Someone was cooking supper—there was a rich, inviting smell of ham and coffee.

On the porch was a man in his shirt sleeves, seated in a slack posture, his chair propped against the wall. "J. H. R. Agard, DRUGS AND SPECIALTIES," the sign read, succinct and utterly vague. As I drew aside, the man on the porch arose with symptoms akin to those of lumbago, pivoting his steps at the knee. He took a stance against one of the posts, put his hands to his back, and expectorated.

"Good day," he addressed me, in a flat voice.

I answered and looked at him. He was small, sallow, and crestfallen in aspect. His eyes were dark and penetrating, yet curiously unexpressive, as though fencing for thoughts and exchanging distrust. He wore a wide-brimmed buff-coloured hat, and glossy celluloid collar and cuffs.

"Stranger in these parts?" he inquired, hitching himself a trifle nearer.

"Yes, at present," I admitted. "Are you the—proprietor here?"

"Well, you might say I am. . . . Hello, what's the matter with that s'ingletree? Where you headed for?"

"Bell's Brake."

"Bell's, huh?—Might' poor place, Bell's." He seemed to weigh some delicate proposal. "Tell you what you might do. Suppose you put up here to-night. Feed that hoss, eat supper, get a good night's rest. There's a shop down the fork a ways, have your buggy fixed up there. Care to stop? Agard's my name, Mr.—"

He had come to the point. I introduced myself and alighted.

"Oh, John!" Agard called. "Come over here—I want to ask you a favour."

"Comin' right now, Doctor. Yes, suh! Git up, *mule*." This ready reply came from a big-muscle Negro field hand who had ridden up the road behind me.

"John," said my host, "I want you to unharness this gentleman's horse for him, unload his baggage, and take his buggy down with you to Mr. Comer's shop. Tell him this gentleman had a breakdown on the road, and ask him if he can't put on a new s'ingletree soon in the mornin'."

"'Deed I will, Doctor," said John, beginning to unfasten the traces. Within five minutes he had mounted and started away, with a shaft in one hand.

"Look here, John," I suggested, "hadn't you better tie that thing to the saddle? You'll get pulled off."

"No, boss," he grinned, "I reckon I better take 'er dishere way—mule's got all *she* kin do to ca'y *me*. San's heavy rollin'. We'll git 'er dar all right!"

The two of them dragged my buggy away. I had forgotten to offer John a quarter. "He didn't expect one," said Doctor Agard. My heart began to warm. It was the kindly feeling of my boyhood; I was getting nearer home.

The doctor and I had supper in the small dwelling house near by. Agard was a bachelor, I learned.

Toward the end of the meal he excused himself and crow-hopped across the hallway into another room. He and the servant, a bedizened young Negress named Sarah, were talking there in a low tone for some minutes. As he returned, I saw his hand on the door and heard his dismal voice:

"You might as well get Number Four ready. . . . Yes, but you never can tell. And take those ear-rings off, like I told you."

The next I saw of him was in the drug store, making up a chill tonic for a late customer, the blacksmith's son. A couple of wall-lamps with tin reflectors showed a surprisingly neat stock of drugs and sundries, though with the usual excess of patent nostrums.

After young Comer left, Agard and I sat on the porch.

He kindled a smudge. I removed my coat, took a chew of his tobacco, and tilted back my chair. He had become so friendly that all my suspicion melted into a sensation of being at home. I knew the accent he spoke, could foretell his very phrases, make the responses—and the old stirring of the pines and the chirp of frogs set me aching for I know not what.

I told Agard why I was going to Bell's.

"Well, I expect you better start your treatment on me," he laughed. "I've been feelin' mighty no-account lately. Can't hardly keep up to my work a-tall."

I assured him that he hadn't the "hookworm look" about the eyes, but in my mind I was not so certain. I promised to leave him a test treatment if he so desired.

I was naturally curious about this man's medical education and practice. His being druggist and so-called "Doctor" in one would not pass as the conventional thing in some places. It savoured just a trifle of the quack. I wished to establish his ethical background.

I got a very candid story. He had started out as prescription clerk, he said, then druggist. He had been importuned again and again to recommend remedies, had seen a local need, and had "read medicine." He had attended brief sessions at Louisville, Kentucky. Though lacking a degree, he had passed the State licensing board's examination and was freely entitled to practise. He was not, however, a member of any regular medical association, so far as I could infer.

I persuaded myself that he was doing more good than harm, though as a rule I am opposed to all forms of empiricism in my profession.

We had sat for a half-hour or so, when he apologized that he had been losing a good deal of sleep and would have to "look around a little" and go to bed.

Just as I was rising to follow the hint, a gun went off somewhere in the woods. In the moment of silence that followed its echo there came to our ears a duller cadence, along the road

from the west—the monotonous plodding of heavy feet. Agard listened to this, and as it continued he hobbled in and came back with a lamp in his hand. Two men presently arrived in the lighted circle. Negroes again, one black as the ace of spades, the other yellow. Their faces were shining with sweat. They carried a tossing form between them on some sort of stretcher which they laid flat on the ground, grunting as they did so, then looked up toward the porch.

“Who’s that?” Agard demanded.

“Bob Tolliver an’ Morgan Luckett,” the black one answered.

“You’re Bob?”

“Yas, suh.”

“Where you from?”

“Down Craney Bayou.”

“Got your wife there?”

“No, suh, my sister, Pearline—Morgan’s wife.” Morgan seemed to shoulder some part of a man’s responsibility at this. They stood looking up with foolish expectancy.

“When was she taken?”

“’Bout sundown.”

The nature of the case needed little explaining.

The doctor seemed to wrestle with some loathsome incubus. “Well,” he concluded, smiling feebly at me, “I reckon you might as well take her to the back.”

They lifted their burden again, and Morgan started up the front steps without more ado.

“Hold on there,” Agard abruptly asserted himself. “Go around to that side gate. There’s no way for you through here.”

The mulatto backed away, muttering, whereupon Agard checked him peremptorily. It is a knack requiring practice and a clear-cut point of view.

“Mope along dar, Morgan, an’ shet yo’ damn’ mouf,” his brother-in-law mumbled urgently as they shuffled away.

“Sarah!” Agard called. “Side gate! Number Four fixed?”

The reply seemed to be in the affirmative.

He turned to me, complaining. “Woman drug in here from a saw-mill for me to look after. Seems like I never *can* get any rest. You go on and turn in—you’ll find your room ready.”

But I did not rush off to bed. Instead, I explained the propriety of my going to the "back" with him.

"No, no!" he protested, wretchedly.

It was as I had surmised: a "hospital," the most unprofessional thing of its kind I have ever beheld, a squatting-place for misery. A playhouse dispensary and operating room; two sheds in lieu of wards, with two-tiered board bunks along each wall. An imbecile black hag in one room, whimpering for cocaine; in the other, a care-free son of Ham who, from some incentive, had reached a hand under a logging locomotive. Dearth of linen; the cases lay on unsheeted oilcloth; dismal kerosene lamps, and remnants of greasy victuals on tin plates.

Pearline was brought in. She was made as easy as possible in the bunk referred to as "Number Four," which Sarah had by some process made "ready." The case was well advanced but not yet urgent. Agard sent the two men on their way and set the elegant Sarah to watch and doze while nature took its course. His one expressed notion as we walked to the dwelling house was that he might yet "get a little sleep."

But by this time curiosity had got the upper hand of me. Agard's "ethical background" was becoming far more complicated than I had supposed. I was to leave early in the morning. He and I talked and tramped around in my room for some time, at the point of saying good-night, and at last sat down on opposite sides of the bed.

"Well, you see," he admitted in a manner of desperation, "things sort-of *drove* me to it—*everything*, seems like. You know, it can get powerful quiet here in the brush. Sometimes for an hour you might hear a pin drop. An' I'd set an' think—just as free as if I was ridin' up yonder on one o' them hot-weather clouds. It's hard to explain. . . ."

"Those mental processes can't be explained," I agreed, diagnosing a solitude-complex.

"No—you understand? Well, an' these niggers, now—you can't let 'em think they're as good as you are, or first thing you know they're *better* than you are, by George."

"Quite right," I observed; "in some localities I could mention they won't give a white woman a seat in a street-car."

"Certainly they won't," he went on. "But, in his place,

I've got no grudge against a nigger—on his side of the counter and in his end of the house. When they used to come to me with the asthma or water-brash, I would always ask 'em about their symptoms an' their kids an' their crops whilst I was takin' their money. Fact is"—he bowed his cheeks to his fists in thought—"I kind o' *like* a decent nigger. It was bred in me, I reckon."

There are limits set in the South to a "liking" for Negroes—somewhat dangerous and very proper limits. This man recognized them; evidently acted within them. His case was very strange.

"Why let that bother you?" I humoured him. "I like 'em myself—any man does that really knows 'em."

"Any man that had the dry-nurse I did," he mused, "a stout, half-grown Kafir-blooded nigger boy! Well, about the drug business, I don't know hardly how it started, but it seemed to be the talk amongst the darkies that I would give 'em a *square deal*—that I would go to some pains to mix 'em the right medicine, and all that."

"You mean, they took you for their *only* friend?" I countered this assumption of virtue.

"Well," he confessed, "I don't know just what to say when you put it that-a-way. There are some as fine old families in these parts as you will ever meet, but there have been a lot o' mighty wild boys that grew up over Dalby way. God knows I believe in chivalry, an' the supremacy of the white race, Stranger, but——" He turned and faced me, suddenly on his guard.

"But you don't believe in leaving the proof of it entirely to the hoodlum element," I conceded. "Any thoughtful white man will agree with you there, so go ahead."

He went ahead somewhat more directly: "Well, I *will* say that things have occurred in this very county that can never be justified under any law of God or gentlemen, and our citizens just let it drift along, drift along. That's what's the matter with our nigger population to-day. Sullen? Disrespectful? Yes, even the good ones feel like they've got no show, no matter how well they behave. Doctor, we're losing our grip on 'em *morally*. It's a big, tangled-up question, I'll tell you. . . . Of course, I went along treatin' 'em about the same as usual, you understand, but more and more they

got to lookin' to me as—well, you might say, a friend. I had to read medicine, I *had* to do the best for 'em I could."

I rather disliked his drift. "But," I broke in, "do you mean to say that the doctors——"

He caught the implication instantly. "Oh, far be it from me," he hurried, "to say anything against the regular medical profession. It's the highest calling on God's earth. I'm just a quack, but I'd give ten years of my life for a proper training. I don't say for a minute that these doctors around here wouldn't treat a black case as straight as they would a white one. But I *do* know that the niggers have got so they are doubtful and suspicious of everything a white man does—think that the only interest he has in 'em is what little money he can get out of 'em."

"Not *my* kind of white man," I objected.

"Nor mine, either. Well, they got to comin' my way—afoot, a-horseback, an' on stretchers—mostly at night. You wouldn't believe it; fifty miles around." A groan escaped him. "The sights I have seen, the tales I have heard! My friend, I *had* to build those measly sheds out there."

"You will have your Reward."

"I hope to obtain Mercy. Anyhow, this nigger business has nearly got the best of me—strength, property, self-respect, and all. I feel like an outcast—not a soul left to stand by and help me but—a black wench."

I rose to the challenge. "Give me your hand, Doctor Agard," I said. "You are my kind of man—my *father's* kind. Your allies are the right-thinking classes here and everywhere, and they will stand up for you, too, whenever they understand about you. As long as I am in this county, people are going to hear you well spoken of; and if I lived here, I would go *partners* with you, provided you would take me on. Just write me down as one *friend*."

His hard eyes melted as he silently returned my grasp, there across the counterpane.

A sound of decrepit wheels in sand.

"Doctor! Oh, Doctor!" The call came stifled out of the dark—searching, vehement—a monstrous whisper.

Agard and I rose and looked at each other.

"That means——"

"Trouble," I nodded.

"Nigger trouble." He seized my lamp and hopped out into the road. I followed. The same crazy buckboard that I had seen that afternoon was in front of the house, the same ancient driver, apparently the same roll of bagging.

"Why, it's Uncle Gabe—Gabe Peak," was Agard's puzzled remark. "What's the matter, Gabe?"

"Doctor, my boy got shot."

"John shot? My God Almighty!" The doctor spoke as though patience with Negro vagaries had limits. "I heard a gun, but never thought about John."

We looked over the back wheel. Unmistakably it was John, or what remained of him. A glance revealed an extravasated chest wound. He was in a daze, and, with thick gore bubbling from his lips, I thought he mumbled some reassurance to me about my buggy.

"Drive around to the side gate," said Agard.

The flimsy establishment got into action quickly. A stout stretcher was brought, and John was immediately conveyed into the rear shed and laid on a table of planks. There was rapid raking through an old sawmill surgeon's kit, opening of a can of chloroform from the store, fetching of gauze and absorbent cotton.

Gabe was terrorized and talkative. At a certain point of his babble Agard closed up his kit and spoke: "Sarah, telephone for Braden the first thing you do. . . . Doctor," he asked, quietly, "can you bear a hand with this case?"

I am a physician, and I answered as such.

"Well," he announced, "we'd better be on the move now. Gabe, you shut up, and take all you can carry—here, take this bag. Wait, Sarah—standin' there with those damned earrings on you!—you help get this man back on the stretcher. . . . Now—I left here at six o'clock on the Dalby road, but you don't know where I was bound for, *do* you?—until the deputy sheriff gets here."

"Doctor, I don't even know whichaway you went, so help me Gawd!" Sarah added the artistic touch.

"All right; you telephone, and then stay here with your patients. Don't try to bar any doors. Where's that Steve?"

The individual in question, sleek and hearty save for the

amputation of a hand. stepped in promptly from behind the door.

"Havin' a fine time around here, ain't you?" Agard greeted him. "Now you take that buckboard and get it away from here as fast as you can, toward Dalby. Get it clear off of the road as soon as you can, and don't worry about coming back right away. Understand?"

Steve apparently caught the meaning. Agard turned to me: "Doctor, shall we be going?"

He took the front of the stretcher, and I the rear. Followed closely by old Gabe, we stumbled along through the dark over pathless ground.

I was reasonably certain that a dead white man and a half-dead Negro were involved in this scrape. Gabe would not even admit that John had stolen the corn. But it stands to reason that he had. He had a mule.

Evidently an altercation had occurred down at the Peak cabin. The white farmer's shotgun and John's five-inch dirk had come into play in some sequence—simultaneously, perhaps, and not in order of the nightmare that Gabe related.

Gabe did not believe that the incident was closed. He was in extremities of fright.

I wanted to hurry but could not see my steps. I heard the buckboard rattling away. We entered the live-oak marsh; three times I was splashing blindly through the "branch." We forced our way through tall bear-grass, willows, and sassafras sprouts. The load of the burly Negro was like iron fetters.

At last a black obstruction loomed before us. This turned out to be another of the doctor's shanties—the "spring-house," he called it. He braced himself and threw back a rusty lock; we passed in and laid our stertorous burden on a dank wooden floor. He then transferred Gabe's load to the inside.

"Now, you clear out of here," he ordered the old darky. "Go up the branch; go *away* up. Keep goin' till you get to Millard's pasture. Then look out for yourself."

Gabe had done the best he knew for his wayward son. He now embraced the occasion to eliminate himself.

Agard struck a match and coaxed an oil wick into flame.

He took off his everlasting cuffs and used my handkerchief to polish the lamp-chimney. I looked about me.

This never had been a "spring-house." There was a broad, rough shelf along one wall, where the surgeon's kit now lay. In the middle of the floor stood a table of pine boards and trestles. There was a window, at the end of the room, closed with a sliding shutter instead of a sash. Below this stood a camp cot. Narrow strips of mosquito screening were tacked here and there over obvious cracks. The lamp hung on a low wooden bracket at one corner of the table.

John was barely conscious. We carefully laid him on the boards and ripped away the rags of his calico shirt.

"Will you operate, Doctor?" Agard ceremoniously invited me.

Operate!—There in the dark.

"No, Doctor, the patient is yours," I replied with due formality. "I shall, of course, be pleased to assist you as required."

I saturated a wad of gauze with chloroform and applied it. The instruments, such as they were, were laid out in order, and I stood by. An intravenous injection was prepared in case of need—a large veterinary syringe which Agard filled accurately before starting to work.

The traumatism of the case may be passed over. It was inordinately gross; the pericardium itself was exposed and doubly punctured.

Agard, however, was not fazed for an instant. He methodically sutured the still oozing pectoral veins, cleared away bone fragments and pulmonary tissue, and went ahead extracting BB shot as daintily as if he expected a pink-tea convalescence. I merely changed sponges—sponges—as fast as I could roll them, and I made an absorbent dressing as big as a hat. The heat, odour, and gas soon became very bad, since the doctor objected to the door being opened—on account of the army of insects, if nothing else.

What was the use of it all? I speculated. Mere make-believe; the slayer's life was triply forfeit. Yet Agard worked on, ant-like, always searching out the obstruction. He was grotesquely impeded: he had no tools, no light, no technique—nothing but intuition; but he exposed the left lateral aspect

of the heart and went about reproducing Laurent's operation like the born surgeon he was.

The hunt was up. First we heard a shot; then two; then a tremendous hullabaloo from up above, knocking about, cur dogs barking, and the shrieking of Negroes.

I looked at Agard and dropped a probe. He never paused.

"I can't be in two places at once," he said. "Glad I can't just now." He faced me. "Would *you* like to beat up to Millard's pasture, Doctor? I can easily turn down the lamp for you."

"I'll do with this for a while yet," I answered. The sweat began to trickle off the point of my chin in a little stream. Agard seemed dry and cool—a man sapped of all moisture.

The racket at the quarters in time wore away to silence; Sarah had evidently kept her trust. I peeped out to see if the premises were on fire.

"I'd keep that door *shut*, if I were you," Agard harshly whispered.

But it must have been a hunting instinct, and not my indiscretion, that was responsible for what followed. The cry was full on us almost before we knew it had started. All the jungle that had seemed to me so vast was covered in one rush. We had just shot home the prepared injection when the door burst open before a booted heel.

"Ah! I knew damned well we'd find 'em together!" the leader exulted.

In the lamp's yellow light he stood instantaneously revealed to my eye, for what he was—a young nobleman. Though frightened out of my wits, I loved him unawares. I claimed him as of my own people. He was a six-footer, about thirty, trim-belted. He covered us steadily with a blue steel automatic. His face was fresh and full; his very teeth were handsome; his voice, though keen with revilings, had a quality that no mongrel ever yet registered.

He was a young lion lashing himself into a proper frenzy.

Behind him trampled a small but adequate mob. I saw a rope, pistols, faces—some stern and resolute, others relaxing already into enjoyment.

"Jim Agard will doctor up the black dog!" shouted the leader. "But never mind, Doc, *we'll* treat his ailment now,

you misbegotten nigger-hugger!" The supporting party cursed emphatic approval.

"Are you sure there's enough of you to take him away from me?" Agard asked, pitifully sarcastic.

"Don't you get smart!" was the unanswerable threat. "I could take him away from *you* with one hand, you little old fool!"

"Yes, I know you could, Lieutenant, if you wanted to paw around with raw meat. This nigger has been shot to death in the first place—let him alone. I've called for the deputy sheriff; can't you let the Law have a whack at him, either?"

"To hell with the lawyers! Agard, do you know what that black fiend's done?" the younger man almost wept. "He cut Rafe Bascom's heart out—*Rafe Bascom!*—the straightest white man God ever made . . . left his poor wife a widow and his girl an orphan—the black, dirty hound! But *you* don't care for that—*you* don't even care who your own mother was. All *you* want to do is to harbour dirty niggers and consort with your little painted nigger wench! Bring that rope, men. I'm goin' to shoot this misbegotten white dog now, and *break up* some of this dirty business around here."

The wretch, Agard, surely thought his last moment had arrived. His voice was a mere husk. "Go ahead and shoot." He grimaced. He turned his limp hands to them, palm outward, his arms blood-stained to the elbow. "If my life has brought me no better esteem than that—if you believe I misconduct myself with the only woman I can hire for a nurse—if I am a *dog* for practising medicine—why, *go ahead and shoot!* B-But you might have a little mercy, Baldwin."

The deadly finger seemed to hesitate on the trigger for an instant. Tense silence had fallen, broken now by the criminal's groans and quiverings on the table.

"Watch that nigger—he's tryin' to get up!" an excited voice called.

My tongue, which had dried and cleaved to the roof of my mouth, loosed itself at Agard's last utterance of the name, Baldwin.

"Don't kill that man, *Clifford!*" I shouted, hysterically. "In God's name, don't disgrace your family by shooting down defenceless invalids!"

All eyes centred on me. Clifford's face, the reckless face of my own cousin, unseen and almost forgotten in fifteen years, stared at me blankly for a second.

"George!" he burst out. "Of all people! What in hell are *you* doin' here with this low-down nigger-kisser? Of course I wasn't goin' to shoot him—just scare him a little. But you've got no business here takin' up for him!"

"I've got a doctor's right to treat a case," I said, my whole body shaking, "and you and your crowd have got no right to dog this poor fellow like hell-hounds till he's afraid to call his soul his own. How could a Baldwin ever do that?"

"Because he takes up with niggers and has nothing to do with decent white people."

"Because you've driven him to it," I protested. "He's told me all about it. And he's clean as a hound's tooth, too. Clifford, I swear to you, this man's doing your dirty work, all by himself, doing the best he knows to smooth out this nigger trouble like a good white man—because he's got a heart and got nerve. And none of you ever reach him a helping hand."

Agard was hanging on my words like a culprit on his attorney's.

"Then what's he doing hiding out this Negro murderer?" demanded my cousin, his voice rising to renewed wrath.

I told him that Agard had no intention of letting any murderer get away; that he only wanted to save his own neck if he could; that the Negro had no chance, in any event. "Look over there, gentlemen, if you want to see a man die," I addressed the others.

It was a gruesome, almost unreal spectacle, not to be dwelt upon. It had a revealing effect upon the beholders. There was a mixture, a beginning reversal, of emotion—a new kind of interest in the concerns and doings of the quack doctor. John did not expire quietly. He was a magnificent brute, of untold powers of resistance. But he never could have survived; of that I am certain.

"My God!" Agard suddenly exclaimed, and toppled over.

A weakness came over me also; but I did not find it necessary to divulge the unprofessional ruse involved in the manner of John's taking off. I am accountable to no man for knowl-

edge of the kind and quantity of solution that Agard had put into the syringe for the worst emergency.

"Well, men, let's adjourn and go home," said Clifford several minutes later. "It looks like this raid was a mistake, and I apologize all round. Doctor Agard, here's sixty-eight dollars and some change. I don't think the boys will bother you much in your work after this. Here's my hand on it—never mind the blood."

More affirmations were received, hands shaken, and the crowd at last was gone—all but my cousin. We three tarried a short while in the shanty and then walked up the rise together.

Agard and I went into the "hospital." It was less of a wreck than I had anticipated, though there was some breakage. Sarah was still there, cowed, with the two other women and her green glass pendants. She announced her intention of leaving at once, but I helped to dissuade her with reassurances and a present of money.

"Well, you see what's happened to *this* night's rest," Agard tried to joke gaily as he set to work again, this time with the woman in the throes of childbirth. His ordeal had made him look sallow, older, more utterly insignificant. There was still a mystery about the man. He was expiating some doom that I had not penetrated.

It was a sombre reunion for my cousin and me, but the late night air was refreshing as we walked down the fork between the pines, through cool sand and dewy tufts of bitterweed.

"Cliff," I asked at last, "how did you fellows ever get so *down* on Agard?"

"Oh, his immorality, I reckon," my kinsman replied, moodily.

"Humbug. I tell you, he's not immoral."

"Well—oh, you know—the nigger business just attracted attention."

"He let his zeal outrun his discretion?" I suggested.

"Yes," Clifford declared, testily, "just like every fool Yankee will, with niggers."

"Yankee?" I gasped. "Why, I took him for one of our own people, born and bred."

"Well, yes, he *was* born and raised right there at the forks.

It seems a little funny. His mother came of one of the very finest families around here—the Millards. But his *father* was straight-out Yankee. The old man came down here from Illinois after the Civil War—Springfield, Illinois, I think they say.”

“Oh, indeed?” I murmured. “Good God, *you don’t say so!*”

So, the mystery about Agard evaporated. At last I had located his Ethical Background. It was not my background, in any vital sense—I should have had wit enough to know that. His was rather palpably connected with the lowly Abraham Lincoln’s. Background. . . . Of course, we are all free to choose our lives to a certain extent; but, on the other hand, there always remains the question of why we choose it.

THE TIE THAT BINDS

BY GEORGE PATTULLO

From Saturday Evening Post

HARDTACK and Wally lolled on the deck of a cargo boat in the crowded harbour of Piræus, wondering what they would do with the night. The sun was setting, and hills and city lay bathed in a mellow golden glow. Behind them some Moslem deck passengers were at their devotions—bearded patriarchs, making obeisance on their prayer mats before bedding down on the hatch. "Time and money, and no place to spend it," grumbled Hardtack. "I knowed all the while this trip would be a bust."

Wally turned on him angrily.

"You wanted to sight-see, didn't you? Well, whose idea was this, anyhow—yours or mine?"

"Any time there's a idea, it's like to be mine," Hardtack admitted; "but I never meant to do nothin' else except ruins—I like a li'l' action now and ag'in. We ain't even caught up to Noah's ark yet, have we?"

"That's right! Go on and beef!"

"I ain't beefin'. Only let's do something."

"Then let's go ashore."

"What for? There's nothin' to do."

"I promised my sister I'd go see the Acropolis," said Wally, stubbornly.

Hardtack let out a yowl.

"More ruins, I bet!"

"These," retorted Wally, "are the wonders of the world. The pinnacle of art was reached by them, my sister says. My sister says the Parthenon by moonlight is majestic."

"What does she know about it? I never even knowed you had a sister!"

"Well, I have. And she's had good schooling, too."

"Huh! Where is it at, this here—what did you say it was?"

"You seen it just before we come into the harbour. Sure you did—the big white thing 'way up on top of that high hill."

"Shucks, that's five miles from here!"

"Sure. It's at Athens, you poor roughneck. Ain't you never read nothin'?"

"How'll we git there?"

"Oh, there's bound to be some way. Come on, shake a leg."

"All right," Hardtack assented, "I'll go. But I hope you'll remember your weakness, Wally."

"There you go again! That's just like you!"

"Well, I only wanted to warn you for your own good."

"Do you take me for a fool?"

Hardtack evaded the question.

"You ain't forgot the ruckus we got into in Constantinople?" he reminded him.

"Whose fault was that? Mine, I suppose!"

"The police seemed to think so. Anyhow, every time a woman looks sideways at you, it ain't safe to figure you've got the all-clear signal, buddy—remember that."

"You make me tired."

"Well, I've done my duty, so let's go."

The formality of obtaining a landing permit delayed them two hours, because the steamer had arrived late in the afternoon and the control and quarantine officers showed no hurry about inspection, so it was after eight o'clock before the pair were ready to start.

"No use goin' now," Hardtack complained.

"Why ain't there? The moon'll be just right by the time we get there. She's near full to-night, too."

"I wish I was."

They haggled with a boatman and were presently put ashore at the landing stage. There they encountered a belated runner for a travel agency frantically searching for some lost trunks, and he directed them to the electric railway. They boarded a first-class car. In a few minutes the train stopped at Phalerum and three gobs got on.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Hardtack, grinning from ear to ear. "Look who's here!"

They grinned back at him.

"Where're you guys headin'?" he inquired.

"The Acropolis."

"So're we," said Hardtack, pleased to discover he wasn't on a fool's errand and that others knew about the place. Then and there they joined forces. The gobs told them that the destroyer to which they belonged was anchored in the harbour of Phalerum and a large liberty party was ashore.

"How about a li'l' drink before we go see that place?" Hardtack suggested. "It'll look better."

They agreed that the point was well taken. Accordingly, on arrival at the station, the five of them piled into a horse cab and set out for what the gobs called Shanghai, that they might hoist a couple of ouzos before tackling the serious business of the evening. None of them spoke Greek and the cabby did not know a word of English, yet he started off without hesitation, cracking his whip.

"How does he know where we want to go?" Wally wanted to know.

"He don't," answered a gob; "but he keeps on goin' till we tell him to stop. It works fine."

Shanghai is a cabaret district of Athens much frequented by sailors. Just as they entered it a terrific clamour broke out directly ahead and the street echoed to the tumult of combat. Men came running from all directions. In ten seconds the crowd grew so dense that their cab could not move.

They sat there and listened to fierce yells, the thudding of chairs and overturned tables, crash of glass and splintering wood.

"Say, what's comin' off?" they demanded of the citizens near them.

"I think," said one who understood, "somebody is angry."

"You're sure it ain't a weddin'?" rejoined Hardtack.

The native made some inquiries and shrugged his shoulders.

"The Americans and the English, they dispute," he announced.

Next instant the cab was empty—empty, with the driver howling for the police and calling heaven to witness what had

been done to him. Here on earth his complaints went unheeded, for the crowd was split wide apart as though a battering ram had struck it. With Hardtack in the lead, they burst through the press and arrived, pell-mell and panting, at the scene of strife.

In a cabaret below the level of the sidewalk a party of American gobs was debating who won the war with a party of English bluejackets. Hardtack gave tongue to a battle whoop and the five plunged into the fray. The maelstrom engulfed them.

Now they've been singing the heroes of antiquity long enough in Greece. A petty skirmish like Marathon, where one hundred and ninety-two Athenians fell, goes echoing down the corridors of time. Xenophon mentions, as important, a battle at Corinth where eight of the contestants were slain!

We do better than that nowadays in a riot. And there was Phayllus' celebrated jump of forty-nine feet! So I submit that the poets did most of the valorous deeds for those old birds, and from the standpoint of fights they were tame affairs. Legend and literary skill have exalted them.

But this was the real thing. No talky-talk here, with each side shoving forth champions to brag and boast and crack their heels together in the hope of scaring the enemy. No, sir, just an honest, sincere knock-down-and-drag-out. Seldom in its history has Athens staged a sweeter fight.

Not that much could be seen. The lights danced and flickered and the dust welled up in choking clouds, obliterating individuals, so that some of the combatants struck out blindly at any one within reach. But Hardtack selected an antagonist and closed and stayed with him. He was a hairy-chested guy with a Gibraltarized skull, and the two livened up the party considerably.

Shouts of encouragement and bellowings of rage; the scraping of feet striving desperately for a hold; thud and grunt of impact. From time to time the surge of the struggling mass propelled a group up the steps and into the street. They promptly fought their way back again. It seemed to be a point of honour not to leave the floor.

Twice Hardtack and his opponent found themselves in the cool night air, where there was plenty of room for their

business. Twice they manfully dived into the mêlée again, although the first time Hardtack had to let go of an advantageous hold on his man's throat. On the second occasion, the bluejacket courteously removed his fingers from Hardtack's hair.

The clangour of the battle reverberated over the city. Spectators in the street were bawling for the town guard; women shrieked; a fire-engine siren in the neighbourhood added to the deafening tumult; the debate below stairs never flagged. Now the affirmatives had the edge, then the negatives won the upper hand. Gradually the uproar subsided to grimmer sounds—short, savage snarls, a moan or two, the gasp of men at the last ounce of effort.

And then the asty-phylax—the town guard—the police—they arrived. They came at a run, scattering the proletariat. At the entrance they stopped. They listened. They hesitated. Then they held a conference. The citizens urged them to get busy. Forming in phalanx, they advanced resolutely to the steps; by sheer weight of numbers they would overwhelm the rioters.

Their cautious approach quickened to a rush. Down they went into the cabaret. The mob raised frenzied cheers. But it was a bit crowded inside, and Epaminondas Papadopoulos came out. He came out without touching the steps, and probably lighted the fires of another revolution by landing in the middle of a couple of spectators from Crete.

Then Phocion Polymenakos, the Spartan, rocketed into view. A bluejacket had hit Phocion a swat that came near to landing him in Plutarch's Lives. One by one they emerged hurriedly, as though they were not wanted down there. Within two minutes the entire body of asty-phylax was out in the street and ready for another conference.

"Here come the soldiers!" rose the cry.

Sure enough, the stirring notes of a bugle soared clear and high above the hubbub. Followed the tread of marching feet—clump, clump, clumpety-clump. The crowd took one earful and tarried not. They have had experience of the military in street troubles in Athens, and they broke and scattered.

Perhaps the sudden hush outside carried foreboding to the warriors locked in straining embrace. Or it may be that

there is a telepathy of danger. At any rate, the fight in the cabaret paused for breath and to listen. Then the combatants broke apart as though by general consent and made a dash for the steps. A few earnest souls continued to punch and gouge as they were swept upward by the rush, but these were mere flotsam on the main stream and did not stay it. Neither did the asty-phylax, who tried to interpose. They were brushed aside, and off ran the disputants, carrying their casualties with them. When the soldiers arrived in Shanghai, everything was as quiet there as in Chinatown after a tong battle.

Hardtack and Wally brought up the rear guard of the American contingent, dragging along one of their gob acquaintances. He seemed a trifle confused as to his whereabouts and kept murmuring "Mamma! Oh, mamma!" A kick in the mid section had probably contributed to unsettle him.

"Here! In here!" Hardtack panted as they arrived opposite a coffee shop with their burden sagging between them.

"They'll catch us," objected Wally.

"I can't run no farther."

There was nobody in the coffee shop except the proprietor, who seemed undecided whether to run or yell for help when they staggered in. From his front door he had heard the row in the cabaret and knew that the soldiers had been called to quell it; also, his eyes told him that here were three of the most active participants.

"Shut the door," Hardtack commanded through puffed lips, and the landlord mechanically obeyed. "Now help me with this boy."

They laid the gob out on the floor in rear of the shop and went to work pumping his arms up and down. Then Hardtack turned him over and administered first aid to the drowning. In spite of these remedies the gob soon became normal and made an abrupt and strong effort to get on his feet again with a view to resuming the debate. The first warning they had of returning strength was when he suddenly let fly a right which caught the landlord squarely on the nose.

"Take it easy, buddy," Wally cautioned. "It's all over and the bunch've legged it."

"I wanna fight," remarked the gob as he held shakily to the back of a chair.

"Sure! It does you credit, too, ol' settler. But sit down now and have one. You'll get lots of chances later on."

They ordered three ouzos. The weeping landlord brought them more from fear than because he wanted their business. He was tempted to rush to the door and summon the police; the only thing that deterred him was a conviction the three would beat him up before the asty-phylax could reach the spot. He sniffled while serving the drinks, but when he discerned the size of the tip that Hardtack left on the table his lamentations ceased and he began to display an interest in the proceedings.

"Here come them soldiers now," exclaimed Wally, but the running feet he heard turned out to belong to five members of the American debating team.

"We got into a blind alley and had to beat it back," they said.

"Just in time," responded Hardtack, cordially. "Garçon, apportez another bunch of ouzos. And pronto, bitte! Get me?"

They sat down with groans of thankfulness, some of them on the verge of collapse. Not a man there but showed the marks of battle. Three of them were fearful sights; Hardtack looked as though he might have cheered for Judge Gary at an I. W. W. meeting.

"I suppose they'll grab us," said a gob. "But meanwhile, here goes!" And he tossed off the milky aromatic liquid at a gulp.

The soldiers did not pursue, however. The Greeks have learned that they'll always get the worst of any international complications with the great powers, so the officer in command discreetly sent word to the respective naval commanders to dispatch patrols ashore, for God's sake.

Silence reigned in the coffee shop whilst the gobs got back their breath and nursed their wounds. After a while one of them inquired, "Say, what're you guys doing here, anyhow?"

"We was on our way to see the Metrolopus," answered Hardtack.

A moan burst from an A. B. who was sitting forward on a stool, his head between his hands. He glanced up wearily

to say, "So was I. This is the third night I've started out to get a look at the Parthenon by moonlight and I ain't made it yet."

"A lot of the boys have, though, Red."

"What good does that do me?" demanded Red.

"My sister says——" began Wally.

"Sure! It's majestic," Hardtack cut in. "Well, it ain't too late to go now."

But they had no heart for sight-seeing. Only the gob who had been kicked in the mid-section took any notice of Hardtack's proposal—he seemed peculiarly tenacious of ideas.

"I'm on," he announced. "I started out to see the Parthenon, and I'm a-going to see the Parthenon."

One of the others suggested: "Well, there's no hurry. How about a beer?"

"I'll go you. But I tell you right now I'm a-going to see the Parthenon."

"Nobody's trying to stop you that I know of."

"They'd better not," said the gob.

Over a round of beers they fell to discussing the events of the evening. All were agreed that nothing but the timely intervention of the soldiery had saved their opponents. Also, they were unanimously convinced that the Old Man would raise Cain, and no mistake.

"Say," remarked a gob, struck with a sudden thought, "how did you two birds get into it, anyhow? Who asked you to the party?"

"You did."

"How come?"

"We heard you yellin' for help," replied Hardtack.

The A. B. transfixed him with a steely stare and retorted in a rasping voice: "Any time you catch me yellin' for help—— Say, for two obols I'd——"

"Aw, cut it out!" somebody protested. "Do you want to start something? Seems to me like we've had enough fightin' for a while."

Said Red, "Ain't it the truth? I've been in more trouble since the Armistice than I was during the whole war."

There was a chorus of assent.

"The limeys and us to-night."

"And us and the limeys at Constantinople."

"And the limeys and the frogs at Haifa."

"And the frogs and the wops at Smyrna."

"Don't forget the limeys and the wops at Leghorn, neither. They piled the stiff's up on the pier."

For a quarter of an hour they reviewed the clashes between sailors of the Allied nations in various ports since the Armistice.

"The war to end war," said somebody in a pause. Catcalls and hoots of derision.

"I've been bummin' round the wurruld, man and bhoy, for twenty-foive years and I never seen the loike of the hate."

"What? You ain't felt the spiritual uplift? Why, I'm ashamed of you, Paddy! You're just awful coarse."

Then Wally broke into a song the dough-boys composed on the Rhine:

"When the next war comes around,
In the front ranks I'll be found.
I'll rush in again pell-mell.
Yes, I will—like hell, like hell!"

They roared the chorus, oblivious of prowling patrols.

"Well, let's get back to the ship," Red proposed. "Might as well take our medicine now as later."

"I'm a-going to see the Parthenon," said the gob with Hardtack.

"All right, we'll all go. Maybe if we can show tickets to the Acropolis the Old Man'll take our word for it that we wasn't mixed up in the row."

"What? With a face like that?" exclaimed Red. "Fat chance!"

The other mournfully admitted that the Old Man was not likely to fall for such a story, but they decided to go along with Hardtack and Wally anyway.

It was growing late when they left the coffee shop and they wandered a considerable distance hunting for cabs. Once they thought they glimpsed a patrol and ran up a dark alley. As they emerged from it into the street again a swelling murmur arrested them.

"What's that?"

The murmur grew to a babel of sounds. It was drawing nearer.

"Another fight! Let's beat it!"

"No, wait a minute. Maybe it's some of the gang."

A mob of men swirled around a corner. Now they moved at a rush, now they stood still. The mass seemed to revolve around its centre; figures darted in and out; the mass heaved and sank and heaved again. Oaths and savage yells. They came to a momentary halt under an electric light and the gobs obtained a clear view of them.

"The limeys! They're at it again!"

"Those aren't our guys!"

"That other bunch has ganged up on 'em! Look! Look at that, will you?"

Above a struggling group a knife had flashed. They did not wait for more. Letting out a yell, they went tearing into the combat.

"Watch out for the knives!" somebody cautioned.

"And when you—git your man down"—this from Hardtack—"be sure he don't git—up agin. Take that!"

Overwhelmed by numbers, the bluejackets were fighting desperately. Three of their number were laid out in the street. They heard the smash of the new attack and turned wearily to meet it. But instead of a fresh rush of the enemy, a hoarse bellow reached them—"All right, you guys! Give 'em hell!"

"The Yanks!"

They swung around and waded into the fight again, and within five minutes the street was cleared. As a mopping-up job it was a creditable performance. A bluejacket kicked the last knife wielder down a flight of steps and summed up the affair with "That's that!"

"Come on!" yelled Hardtack. "Let's beat it while the going's good!"

They picked up their wounded and scattered in all directions. Hardtack and Wally found themselves running down a street alongside some gobs and half a dozen of the English. They did not slacken pace until well away from the scenes of disturbance.

Then a bluejacket panted, "I sy, wot's the 'urry?"

There was sense to this, since they had arrived in a portion of the city where patrols would not be likely to search for them. They slowed to a walk.

"'Ow about some beer?"

Not a dissenting voice—practical thinking like this has built up the British Empire. They looked around them for a coffee shop.

"We'll have to get a move on or it'll be closing time," remarked a gob.

At last they found one at a curve in the street.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Hardtack, jovially, as they drew several tables together and sat down.

"Wot ho, matey!" It was the hairy gent who had engaged his attention earlier in the evening. They grinned at each other.

"You can beat me runnin'," said Hardtack.

"Yus, and I can beat your blinkin' 'ead orf at anythink," retorted the bluejacket, giving him a lusty slap on the back, and proceedings started in all good fellowship.

There was no beer to be had, but the landlord produced a fair quality of cognac. They stayed there for nearly an hour, long past closing time. In vain the harassed proprietor besought them to leave. They pretended not to understand.

As the minutes passed, the *entente cordiale* became a love feast. They pledged one another; they solemnly vowed eternal friendship. There were songs, all of them sentimental, with bluejackets and gobs roaring the chorus in close harmony.

And then—"Strike me dead, but you blokes just got there in the nick o' time," remarked the hairy-chested man as he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"But we always do," replied Hardtack. "Ain't you noticed that, ol'-timer?"

"Wot d'you mean by that?"

"Well, we saved your hides, didn't we?"

"Wot of it?"

"Nothing."

"I know wot you mean! You tyke that back, do you 'ear? Tyke it back!"

"Take back nothin'! That goes as she lays!" Hardtack retorted.

The bluejacket pushed back his chair and very deliberately moved the table aside in order to make room for the ceremonies.

"We may as well finish it 'ere," he remarked with a sort of sad patience.

Next minute the two were at it, hammer and tongs. Several members of the party tried to separate them and restore peace. Whang! They got what the peacemaker usually gets and promptly joined the fracas. In no time at all they had resumed the debate at the point where they broke off in the cabaret.

The landlord fled at the first blow. He fled as fast as he could leg it to the nearest square, where he encountered an American patrol of six men under a gunnery officer, sent ashore to round up the liberty party. They hardly needed his guidance—the noise of the row was echoing from the hills.

"Cheese it!" shouted one of the combatants as the officer reached the door.

They went from there any way they could—out the back way, through windows, down cellar. Hardtack and Wally managed to gain the backyard, whence they streaked down an alley. But several of the gobs fell into the hands of the patrol.

"This is a fine business, isn't it?" roared the gunnery officer. "You men ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

No response.

"Fighting in a foreign port and giving the Navy a bad name!"

Still no reply.

"Well, I hope they gave you a damned good licking. You look like it."

The gobs did not utter a word.

"Did they? Don't stand there like a lot of dumb-bells! Who licked?"

Meanwhile Hardtack and Wally had hailed a cab and given orders that they should be conveyed to the station without pause. There they caught a train for Piræus and an hour later a boatman rowed them out to their steamer.

"Well," said Hardtack as they set foot on deck, "we sure were lucky to git out of that."

"But we never did get to see the Parthenon!"

"Shucks, what does that matter?"

"I promised my sister——"

"You can send her a picture post card, can't you?"

"I reckon so," Wally replied, but he kept muttering to himself all the way to their cabin.

"What the Sam Hill will I tell her?" he demanded.

"Well, I am surprised at you! Tell her the Metrolopus sure looks majestic by moonlight."

"Or I could copy a piece out of the guidebook, maybe," Wally suggested.

"Lots of 'em do it. Say, Wally, when you buy them post cards, git one for me, too."

"What for?"

"Well, I've been figurin' I might send one to Mamma. Mamma don't know where the Metrolopus is at, but it'll sort of comfort her to know I ain't wasting my time."

They started to undress.

"Well," remarked Hardtack with a sigh of satisfaction as he washed the blood from his face, "we had a nice time, anyhow, didn't we? And say, I'd liefer fight with them limeys than any guys I know."

"They sure do give you your money's worth," said Wally.

Both of them drew automatics from their hip pockets, slipped them under the pillows and went peacefully to sleep.

THE COURIER OF THE CZAR

BY ELSIE SINGMASTER

From Saturday Evening Post

HEARING the clock strike twelve Betsey Shindledecker opened her eyes. She had not been asleep, she had merely been waiting for her sister Tilly who lay by her side to be asleep. At eleven o'clock Tilly had spoken, at half past she had turned from one side to the other; but now, for half an hour, she had been lying quietly.

Betsey lay blinking and looking round the room. The windows were dim rectangles outlining a sky which was only a little brighter than the black wall; the ancient bureau and washstand and dower chest showed only as indistinct masses. All other objects were lost: the two coloured prints on the wall, one of "Marianna," one of "Julianna," the mirror, the chairs, one draped with the plain Mennonite garb of Betsey, the other with the plain Mennonite garb of Tilly. The two white caps hanging on the tall posts at the foot of the bed were lost and so were the stripes in the carpet and the gay pattern of the coverlet. It would be impossible for any night to be darker, or for any wind to whistle more ominously than the wind whistled at this moment round the corners of the house.

Her mind relieved by Tilly's quiet breathing, Betsey explored with hand and foot. Her foot sought her woollen slipper, her hand the thick flannel gown which hung on the post near her head. Finding both, she stood in a moment slippered and robed. Still Tilly breathed quietly.

Moving slowly Betsey approached the door. When a board creaked beneath her great weight she stood still a long time; when Tilly sighed, she put out her hand to clutch the corner of the bureau and thus to support herself. She grew

no more comfortable in mind as she advanced, because the steps would creak far more loudly than the floor, and when she reached the bottom of the flight she would have to speak a reassuring word to the dog and the cat. This was not a new experience; for almost a month she had been stealing nightly from her sister's side.

Compared to the bedroom the kitchen was bright. The fire shone through the mica doors of the stove and was reflected from the lustre ware on the mantel and the brass knobs on the ancient cupboard. The black window-panes formed mirrors so that there seemed to be many fires. On one side of the room a quilt was stretched on a frame and on the taut surface lay scissors, spools of thread, a little pincushion, two pairs of spectacles, and two thimbles. The ground of the quilt was dark and spread over it were multitudes of white spots of various sizes.

Other reflecting surfaces were presented by the eyes of a Maltese cat and an Airedale dog, the one lying on a chair, the other beside the stove. Apparently unsurprised by this mysterious advent in the middle of the night, the cat purred and the dog parted his lips and teeth in a grin, and both having raised their heads laid them down. They paid no heed when Betsey, touching a spill to the coals, lit the hanging lamp which illuminated brilliantly the quilt and the sewing implements lying upon it. The background of the quilt was blue and the white spots were star-shaped. The Milky Way crossed the surface diagonally and along the edge and in the dark spaces were set Orion, the Pleiades, Ursa Major, and other familiar constellations. Between the stars the quilt was covered with tiny stitches set close together.

Sinking into one of the Windsor armchairs at the side of the frame, Betsey selected a needle from the pincushion. It was not one of the fine needles with which the delicate quilting had been done, but a larger one, and she used it not to sew, but to destroy sewing. Stitch by stitch she ripped the fine work, sighing as she did so. It was clear that that which she ripped was not as even as the section opposite the other chair.

The hands of the clock pointed to half-past twelve, and presently to one. Then Betsey exchanged the large needle for a smaller one and threading it began to replace the stitches

she had ripped out. Those she put in were as straight as a ruler and as much alike as rice grains.

At three o'clock she rose stiffly. Though her back ached, and though her eyes were heavy and her hands stiff she was happy; the catastrophe which she feared and against which she struggled was postponed a little longer. Then, suddenly, she was smitten by terror. She did not exactly hear Tilly move, but she knew that Tilly had moved, moreover, that she was awake. If Tilly spoke she believed she would die of shock. But when Tilly did speak she answered calmly.

"Betsey!" The voice was sharp with terror. "Sister!"

"Yes." Betsey walked toward the stairway.

"Where are you?"

"I'm coming." What should she say? It would be easy to invent an excuse, but Betsey did not like to lie. "I did not lock the door, Tilly."

"Why, no, of course not! I locked it, like always. Come back to bed!"

"I'm coming," answered Betsey.

Her voice was steady, but her heart jumped in her side. As she grasped the railing to ascend she was aware of her pulse throbbing in her wrist. She felt her way across the room and lay down, slippers, gown, and all. She was trembling, not only because she was frightened, but because she was cold.

"I had a queer dream," said Tilly, drowsily. "I dreamed I could not see any more to sew straight."

"Are you awake?" asked Betsey, sharply.

Tilly did not answer. Did she speak from a dream or from full consciousness?

Hearing the clock strike twelve, Betsey opened her eyes. It was harder to open them to-night than last night and last night it had been harder than the night before. It was the twenty-eighth night she had wakened at twelve o'clock and had gone faltering down the stairs.

Beside her Tilly lay quietly, her breathing that of a child. The sky was black outside the rectangle of the window and there was again an uneasy whispering round the frame. The old furniture showed only vague outlines.

"I can't do this forever," said Betsey to herself. "I'm

getting thin, and I'm getting so tired I can't wake on time, and then what will happen?"

Her exploring foot sought her slipper, her exploring hand sought her bed-gown. Anxiety made her nervous; she held her breath to listen. But Tilly slept sweetly.

"If I'm no more so heavy the boards won't creak so under me," she thought as she felt her way across the room. "*Ach*, but I'm tired!" She repeated the word mentally with each step. "Tired, tired, tired."

In the kitchen there was the same glow of the fire, the same loveliness of light and shadow. The Maltese cat lay on his chair, the Airedale dog lay before the stove. Each lifted his head and each settled himself and closed his eyes. The starry quilt had advanced a little farther; a new section was set with two varieties of stitches, one short and regular, the other long and irregular.

Betsey found her large needle and sat down heavily. She ripped one stitch, then another. The point of the needle caught in the material and made little marks. She bent lower and lower—were her eyes also growing dim? She picked out another stitch and another, then her forehead touched the belt of Orion, her hand lay quietly upon Ursa Major.

After a long time she became conscious of some impending danger. Was she hurt and helpless? When she opened her eyes and saw Tilly standing by the quilting frame power was restored to her and she sprang up. Tilly stood tall and bent in her gray bed-gown. Saying nothing, she looked at the starry quilt, then at her sister, then at the starry quilt.

"What is it?" she asked at last. "What do you make alone here in the middle of the night?"

Betsey stood paralyzed.

"You're ripping out my sewing and doing it over. That's how it gets always all right by morning. Isn't it so, Betsey?"

Betsey did not answer.

"You think I can't see any more?" demanded Tilly.

Betsey said not a word.

"No, I can't see any more." Tilly answered her own question. "This long time already I have trouble. I can't see to sew. I can't see to read. Sometimes I can't see you. I've twice stepped on the cat and once on the dog. If I do not step on them all the time it's because they get nice

out of my way. They know me. I'll give up sewing. You'll have enough trouble with me yet, Betsey, without ripping out my crooked stitches. Now come to bed."

Betsey looked at the clock—the hands pointed to half-past four.

"It's not worth while to go to bed. I'll get dressed ready to milk and I'll watch for Herr when he comes to fetch the milk and I'll say he shall tell Doctor Landis to come to us. He'll cure you, Tilly. He'll surely cure you."

The clock ticked solemnly—it was now eight o'clock, now nine. Soft flakes of snow had begun to fall, the sky seemed to stoop lower and lower. Tilly sat at the end of the settle, her elbow on the arm, her hand supporting her bending face, a finger pressed upon each eye. Now and then a tear rolled down her cheek.

"It's not that I'm crying," she explained, angrily. "It's that my eyes water."

"Yes," said Betsey. Betsey was the only moving object except the pendulum of the clock. The dog and cat lay motionless but alert. Even the cupboard and the mantel and the starry quilt seemed to be alert and waiting.

"It's ten o'clock," said Betsey at last. "Why, then, does he not come?"

"He has perhaps a great many sick ones," suggested Tilly. Betsey looked up the road and then down.

"You can't see far in the snow," she explained.

"Is it snowing?" asked Tilly.

Betsey turned from the window and looked at her sister.

"Do you ask because you want to keep your eyes covered? Or is it that you can't see?"

"I want to keep my eyes covered," declared Tilly. Tilly did want to keep her eyes covered, but it was because she believed that if she uncovered them she could not see. "I sewed perhaps a little too late last evening. If you want to sew, Sister," she said, heroically, "then sew."

"I don't need to sew," answered Betsey. "He's coming. He has his buggy, not his auto. I guess he's afraid the snow will get deep for him. He's driving his Minnie-horse, the yellow one. She's a good horse; they say when sometimes he's tired and falls asleep she takes him home. I would

rather have a good horse than an auto. He's stopping at the gate." Betsey's voice grew shrill, the dog and the cat lifted their heads, the furniture seemed to stir as though that for which they all waited was now imminent. "I don't believe he'll hurt you, Sister."

Doctor Landis tied his horse and came up the path, a stout, ruddy-faced man with a short bristling moustache. He walked heavily, carrying his medicine case in one hand and a book in the other. He was a worldly Lutheran and a great reader.

"He's carrying his book," said Betsey. "He forgets he has it, I guess. If he would read the Bible, how fine that would be!"

Tilly did not answer. The water which streamed from her eyes burned like fire.

Doctor Landis brought in with him a breath of cold air and the pleasant odour of drugs. The room seemed to brighten; Tilly's spirits rose and Betsey felt so relieved that she sank upon a chair. He laid his medicine case and book on the settle and pulled off his gloves. He was able to speak the fluent Pennsylvania English of his generation though he preferred the Pennsylvania German of his ancestors.

"Well!" he said. "Did I bring that wicked book along? I have no wife and no child and I'm not a smoker and I must have something to fill in the time in this healthy place. It's twenty years since I was in this house. Now what's the matter with the eyes, Tilly?"

"They burn me and ache me." Tilly still pressed her fingers against the lids. "I can't see any more."

"You mean you can't see me?"

"I can see you if I take my hand away. But I can't see to sew."

Doctor Landis bent above the quilt. He made an inquiring sign to Betsey, pointing first to the quilt then to Tilly. Betsey nodded and he completed the pantomime by shaking his fist at the starry sky.

"Let's see these eyes." He sat down by Tilly on the settle and she put out her hand on the other side. It touched the book which he had laid there and she clutched it and held it as though it were a rope flung to a sinking swimmer.

"Open your eyes," commanded the doctor.

As Tilly obeyed with agony, the hot flood became hotter. She could see the doctor's face, but nothing beyond it, not even Betsey standing at his elbow.

"It's worse to-day than yesterday," she said, as though that lightened the seriousness of the case.

"And worse yesterday than day before, I dare say," said the doctor. "Yet you kept on sewing?"

"We had the starry quilt to finish," explained Tilly. "I thought when the starry quilt was done I'd rest my eyes and then it would also be soon time to work in the garden."

The doctor lifted the lid of Tilly's right eye, then the lid of the left. Tilly could not suppress a groan, at sound of which Betsey trembled from head to foot. The doctor rose heavily.

"Have you any black muslin, Betsey?"

Betsey took a roll from the cupboard drawer. Standing by the table the doctor folded a thick bandage and laid white gauze upon it, then he turned to Tilly, a bottle and a medicine dropper in his hand.

"Watch me, Betsey. See? Like this, four drops in each eye, night and morning."

"Oh! Oh!" moaned Tilly.

"Keep your eyes tight shut. Now I'm going to bandage them with a black bandage. If for any reason you have to remove it, you're to do it in a dark room."

"Must my eyes be tied shut?" gasped Tilly.

"They must indeed." The doctor stood at the table spreading salve upon the white gauze. "Put fresh gauze on, Betsey, and fresh salve, night and morning."

"For how long?" faltered Tilly.

"A week from to-day I'll be back to look at them."

"A week!" cried Betsey. "Must she keep them covered for a week?"

Smitten dumb, Tilly said nothing; she merely lifted the doctor's book and opened it as if to read and thus prove that this was a bad dream.

"A week at least," announced the doctor. "Then we'll see how they are. Too much quilting, Tilly. How old are you?"

"Only sixty-five," answered Tilly. "And I have good

spectacles. I bought them from such a peddler twenty years ago."

"I'll bet you did," mocked the doctor.

He came across the room holding the bandage as a child might hold a cat's cradle and tied it tight round Tilly's eyes.

"Not a whole week!" wailed Tilly.

"A whole week," said the doctor, pulling on his gloves. "Betsey can surely amuse you for a week."

It was nine o'clock in the morning and the Shindledecker kitchen was in order for the day. The cow had been milked hours ago, the dog and cat had been fed, the human beings had eaten their breakfasts, the dishes had been washed, and a dozen doughnuts, four pans of rusk, three pies, and one cake had been baked. At the window sat Betsey, a mass of blue, star-dotted material on her lap. The starry quilt was out of the frame and she was putting in the hem. Outside the rain poured upon the sodden earth. From within the landscape looked inexpressibly dreary, but when the door was opened there came in the smell of spring.

Tilly did not sit at the window, nor was there sewing in her lap; she sat in the corner of the settle and her hands were empty. The black bandage remained across her eyes.

"First it was a week," she said, despairingly. "Then another week and another week, and now yet another week."

"I have a feeling that next time it will be different." Betsey spoke in the strained voice of one determined to be cheerful.

"I have no such feeling," answered Tilly. "I feel that he will come and come and come and that I will sit and sit and sit. If it was only something in the world to do!"

"I'll read to you," offered Betsey.

"I know the Bible from beginning to end," declared Tilly. "I've read it every day since I was little. I don't believe it's meant we shall get stale on it. And the hymn book, that I not only know, but I can say it and sing it from the beginning to the Doxology, both German and English. And the Martyr Book, that I know, too. I know all about how they were persecuted and driven out and sent to prison and beheaded. I know how one of the brethren was burned with

an iron. You can't catch me on the Martyr Book. And the almanac, that I know also."

"We could sing," suggested Betsey. Her voice had a heartbroken quality. Her heart was breaking.

"Sing!" mocked Tilly. "*Sing!* When I'm blind!"

The clock ticked on and on, the rain fell steadily, silently upon the earth, audibly upon the roof of the porch, noisily through the tin spouting. Another sort of rain fell quietly from Betsey's eyes upon the starry quilt. Tilly did not cry, the consequent physical agony was too keen.

"If I only could do something for you!" mourned Betsey in her heart.

"You can do something for me if you will," said Tilly, as though she could see into Betsey's heart.

"What can I do for you?" asked Betsey, eagerly.

"There's a book in this house," said Tilly. "The doctor left it the first time. I guess he forgot it. When he said I must have my eyes tied shut I looked quickly at it. I couldn't read the reading, but I saw the picture. It was a picture of an old woman kneeling and a sword was pointing at her and a man was standing with a whip over her. Her back was bare and her breast was bare. I must know what happened to that old woman. Will you not?"—Tilly's wheedling voice besought, pleaded; she knew but too well how much she asked—"will you not read me that book, Betsey?"

"Where is the book?" asked Betsey, to gain time.

"Hidden in the upstairs," confessed Tilly. "I hid it. I was afraid he would ask for it. I hid it first in the churn, then I carried it in the upstairs."

"He did ask for it," said Betsey. "He said did I see such a book laying round. I told him no."

"I heard you," acknowledged Tilly. "It was before I took it to the upstairs. I was then sitting on it. Will you read me that book, Betsey?"

"I cannot," said Betsey, weeping. "Anything else I'll do for you. But that's the world's book."

"You'll not find out what became of that poor old woman with the sword pointing at her and the whip coming down on her?" Tilly's voice was hard.

"No," wept Betsey. "I can't. It's to resist temptations

such as this that we're given strength. We've done our duty all our lives, let's not now break our rules when we're old."

The rain fell soddenly, the tears of Betsey fell steadily, Tilly sat motionless and blind on the settle.

"The cat is getting all the time fatter," said Betsey, achieving a brief composure.

There was no reply.

"But the dog gets a little thinner now that he goes so often out rabbit-chasing."

There was no answer.

"Sister," said Betsey. "Won't you talk to me?"

"I have nothing to talk about," said Tilly. "Dogs, cats, rabbits, baking, rain—how sick I am of all these subjects! I'd like something new to talk about. I'd like to know what became of that poor old woman with the sword pointing at her and the whip held over her. I'd like to talk about her."

"It's a book of the world's people." Betsey buried her face in the starry quilt. "I cannot. I cannot!"

The sun rose at six o'clock and its earliest beam, shining in the face of Betsey, woke her from sleep and to the consciousness of a leaden heart. It was Sunday and all her life until a few weeks ago she had wakened cheerfully on Sunday. She enjoyed the rest from labour, she loved to go to meeting, she loved all the day's peace and opportunity for meditation. The meeting-house stood across the road and there had never been a rain so heavy or a snow so deep that attendance was impossible. A few times there had been no one else there but William Hershey and once even William had not been able to get through the drifts on the mountain road, but the sisters never missed.

Betsey waked now with no sense of peace or assurance. She repressed a groan, as, turning, she looked at the bandaged head on the pillow beside her. Six weeks had passed since the doctor's first visit, but Tilly's eyes were still useless. She slept quietly and her mouth below the black cloth was not unhappy. The blind are said to resign themselves more quickly than the deaf—perhaps Tilly had resigned herself. Or, her fate still hanging in the balance, she may have felt hope.

Betsey had not only her acute and tender anxiety about

her sister to trouble her, she had a sin to remember and a cruel penance to look forward to. She had committed an offence and this morning she meant to confess it in meeting.

"I can be a sinner," said she, weeping. "But a hypocrite I cannot be. I can't look them any more in the eye over there."

Slipping carefully from bed she went about her work. Tilly slept late and it was well that she did so; her cruel hours of conscious darkness were that much shorter. Betsey opened the kitchen shutters and let in the horizontal sunshine; then she shook down the fire and slipping into her working jacket took her milk pail on her arm. The morning was not cold; the day which had dawned was to be like a day of May dropped accidentally into March. Tulips and hyacinths were pushing up through the soil of the garden, buds were swelling, the woodland back of the house had begun to have a look of misty purple as the twigs and little branches changed colour. Spring had always meant a foretaste of heaven to Betsey—how strange it was to have an aching heart!

Tilly slept on and on. Betsey prepared the breakfast and still she had not come. She stole upstairs and looked at her and realized after a moment of panic that she was asleep and not dead. Pushing the breakfast to the back of the stove she sat down with her Bible. But she could not read—the book lay strangely in her hand, the words looked unnatural, there was no sense of comfort from touch or sight.

At nine o'clock, when Tilly had not waked, Betsey stole to the room once more and got her Sunday dress and returning to the kitchen, put it on. The devil tempted her to make an excuse of Tilly's blindness to stay at home, but she resisted him. He seemed to whisper in her ear; she saw his smile, his horns, his cloven hoofs.

"Don't go this morning," he said. "Go next Sunday. This morning the meeting will be large. William Hershey will be there with all his family—you don't wish those little children to hear you make confession. Elder Nunnemacher will be there and you have always stood well before him. Perhaps next Sunday he will have to go elsewhere. The Stauffer sisters will be there—think how astonished they will be! And the Lindas, the Ugels and the Erlenbaughs and Herrs

and the Schaffers—all will be amazed. Wait, Betsey, wait."

"No," said Betsey aloud to the empty room. "I'll not wait. I'll leave my poor sister to find her way down, but I'll not wait."

Walking to the foot of the stairs she called up to Tilly.

"It's time for me to go to meeting, Sister. Can you eat your breakfast alone, do you think? It's everything ready."

"Yes," answered Tilly. "Or perhaps I'll lay till you come back."

"Yes, well," said Betsey. "You can call the dog to you."

Betsey shuddered—she had told a lie, it was not quite time to go; only William Hershey had driven up to the meeting-house and he came early to make the fire. But she dared not wait.

On the porch she lingered and breathed in the sweet air. If she could only breathe enough, perhaps she could ease her heart. But contemplation of nature could not heal sin, that was certain as the sin itself. She went slowly down the path to the gate and across the road and into the meeting-house. William Hershey was putting coal into the stove, Mary Hershey sat with her baby in her arms, little Amos and little David walked sedately about.

"Good morning," said William. "How are you, Betsey, and how's poor Tilly? We're coming soon to see you."

"She's not good," answered Betsey, selecting a seat. She did not smile at the children or answer William's announcement of his visit; she merely turned her face to the wall and sat motionless. Her black bonnet hid her eyes, her stout shoulders were bent, her woe was so apparent that the members entering happily from the morning sunshine were cast down. Was poor Tilly, indeed, doomed to blindness?

Elder Nunnemacher did not appear and William Hershey preached a short sermon. He selected his subject for the benefit of Betsey, pointing to the joys of Heaven as a reward for the sufferings of earth, not dreaming that Betsey believed herself shut out of Heaven. Her heart sank lower and lower, her lips trembled, she could scarcely restrain herself from crying out. She knew that everybody was looking at her and feeling sorry for her and the devil tempted her again through self-pity.

"You have nobody in the world but Tilly. You're not rich. You have no husband and no children. Life has cheated you. Take what pleasure you can. Show some spirit. Don't make a fool of yourself."

"I will make confession," said Betsey in her soul.

"Wait till after the hymn, anyhow," advised the devil.

"No," said Betsey. As William finished she rose slowly. "I have something to say," she announced in a muffled tone.

In the silence which followed Betsey looked at the floor. The Shindledeckers never spoke in meeting; they never spoke to any one who did not first speak to them; they almost never went from home and they never willingly admitted strangers to their house. There was, their friends believed, no one in the world so shy. And here was Betsey on her feet. All sorts of wild notions flew through their astonished minds. Was Tilly dead and had Betsey lost her reason?

"I must confess my sins," declared Betsey in a stronger tone. "I've done wrong. I've done what is forbidden among us: I've read a worldly book. It's a large book with pictures, called 'The Courier of the Czar.'" "The Courier of the Czar" was only a secondary title; upon the real name, "Michael Strogoff," Betsey did not dare to venture; as it was she pronounced Czar in two syllables, the first *k*. "It was called 'The Courier of the K-zar.'"

She was heard not with disapproval but with stupefaction; her audience did not understand what she meant. They knew the Bible and the hymnal and some of them knew the Martyr Book but they knew no other literature. They did not know the word "courier" nor the word "K-zar." Betsey saw their stupefaction.

"A courier is a messenger," she explained. "He's one that carries messages and goes on errands. A K-zar is a king."

Still all the Hersheys and Erlenbaughs and Stauffers looked at her blankly.

"It's a story," she went on. "We have stories in the Bible and stories in the Martyr Book. But we know all the stories in the Bible and the Martyr Book by heart. This is a new story. This man is to carry a message for the K-zar to his brother who's in a city with enemies all around it. He must go three thousand miles through enemies and forests

and across great rivers. The Susquehanna is nothing to those rivers. A wicked man, Ivan, catches him; and in order to make him tell who he is he takes his mother and puts a sword in front of her and is going to whip her and when she shrinks from the whip the sword will pierce her. That's what he does. It's like you read in the Martyr Book when they burned the people and drowned them. Then when this courier defended his poor mother this Ivan burned his eyes with a hot sword and made him blind." Betsey's tongue failed her on this word, she repeated it and her effort produced a prolonged and tragic sound—"b-l-i-n-d!"

"But he went on and on and a young girl helped him. They find a good young man who's their friend and this Ivan has had him buried in the sand up to his neck and big birds get after him and he dies. They come at last to the place where he's to give his message to the brother of the K-zar and they're floating on an iceberg down the river and there are springs of something like coal-oil near the river and it's on fire and they're floating on the ice in the midst of the fire."

Stupefaction continued but it was now not the stupefaction of amazement but of enchantment. Betsey told her story well and every eye was fixed upon her; every pair of lungs was either full of air or empty of air; inhalation and exhalation had ceased.

Betsey, alas, ceased also.

"That's as far as I have gone," she said, exhausted. "But I'm going to finish this book. I'm going to finish it this afternoon on the Sabbath, whether or no."

Now eye met eye, colour came back into pale cheeks. The prevailing expression was one of excitement touched with horror. Betsey remained standing; she seemed about to leave; as though, willing to bear the consequences of her crime, she would excommunicate herself and depart. Only William Hershey was able to reason. He rose slowly, his gentle bearded face turned toward Betsey. Were there tears in William Hershey's eyes?

"Betsey," said he, slowly. "Do you do this for your poor sister?"

Betsey seized the back of the bench before her. She looked smitten, as he looks the secret of whose heart is discovered.

"Don't blame Tilly. The doctor says she must be yet for

a long time in the dark. She knows the Bible and the Martyr Book and the hymns and now her mind has to work all the time on itself."

"You're reading this to her?"

"I'm reading it aloud," said Betsey, stubbornly. "If she listens I can't help it."

"Sit down," bade William, gently and commandingly. "It's here something that this sister must decide. She must do what she thinks is right. Let us sing Number Thirty-seven."

But Betsey was not through.

"I like this reading," she confessed, wildly. "I don't feel wicked in my sin. It makes me feel good, it sort of clears out my soul. I would rather read than quilt. And we have fifty-eight quilts. Many times Tilly and I wept over the poor martyrs—why should we not weep over these poor others? Our forefathers fought with wolves where this meeting-house now stands. The Hersheys were in it, I'll bet, and the Stauffers and the Erlenbaughs—all had to fight. I forgot to say that when this poor courier of the K-zar and the young girl were floating down the fiery river the wolves got after them. They——"

William Hershey was alarmed; he despaired of Betsey's reason. He started Hymn Number Thirty-seven.

The stewed chicken and the mashed potatoes and dried corn and slaw and cherry pie which composed the Shindle-decker dinner were consumed and all evidences of the meal removed. The cat lay on his chair; he slept, then woke and looked about, then slept again. Betsey went to the porch to hang up the dish-towels and the dog came back with her. He had an expectant air and when he lay down he did not rest his head on his paws, but kept it high. Below her black bandage Tilly's mouth looked happy. Betsey was pale, but she, too, looked happy. Tilly's head turned, following her sister as though she could see. She looked impatient.

Betsey opened the door of the ancient cupboard and got out a book. The doctor knew now where his book was and he had promised Tilly to bring her others by the same author. One was called "A Journey to the Moon," another "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." But Tilly knew there

was no book like this in the world and she meant to ask Betsey to read it again and perhaps again. Her necessity knew no consideration for others; she would take all the blame for Betsey's sin if there were blame; but Betsey must read.

"I'm ready," she said. The smile on her face was beatific.

Betsey opened the book. Forsaking one of the unities, the author had brought the villainous Ivan into the foreground of the narrative. Himself disguised as the Courier of the Czar he had entered the besieged city and was about to betray it. Upon him in a room of the Grand Duke's palace, having escaped the burning river, came the real courier led by his faithful maiden. In terror, Betsey laid the book upon her knee.

"Now everything is at an end," she warned her sister. "Remember he cannot see, and here is this wicked Ivan who can see. What can he do?" Her face was pale. "You must be prepared, Sister."

Tilly clasped her hands.

"Go on," she said, weakly. "I'm ready."

Betsey's eyes travelled down the page.

"Oh, Sister!" she cried, sharply.

"What is it?" asked Tilly.

"Oh, listen!"

"Go on!" urged Tilly.

"Ivan uttered a cry," read Betsey. "'A sudden light flashed across his brain. 'He sees!' he exclaimed, 'he sees!'" And like a wild beast trying to retreat into its den, step by step, he drew back to the edge of the room.'"

"He's not blind, then?" gasped Tilly. "But it said he was blind!"

Betsey read on:

"'Stabbed to the heart the wretched Ivan fell.'"

"But how——"

Betsey lifted her hand for silence. Here were medical words she could not pronounce, but she could give the blessed sense of what she saw.

"Listen once! When they held the hot sword before his eyes, he was crying to think of his poor mother and his tears saved his eyesight."

"Oh, I'm thankful to God," cried Tilly. "Oh, read that part again, dear sister."

Betsey looked out the window; she needed suddenly a wider view than she could get across the kitchen, broad as it was. She looked out the window to the east then out the window to the west. She rose and walked first to the one then to the other.

"Oh, do read it again!" besought Tilly. "Just once, Sister. I'll ask for no more. Oh, please!"

Betsey gazed out as though at some strange phenomenon. There was a truly strange phenomenon to be seen.

"Oh, I would like to hear it again," begged Tilly. When Betsey did not answer she was terrified. "Why don't you speak to me, Betsey?"

Another person spoke for Betsey. The door opened and the two Stauffer sisters came in. They were about the same age as the Shindledeckers and like them one was tall and stout and the other tall and thin. From under their black bonnets they looked out, at once eager and guilty and excited.

"We came——" began one and looked at her sister.

"We came to see how that fine man got through," finished the sister. "We came to see if he's yet alive. It's surely no sin!"

Betsey stood looking at them and then out the window. Utterly bewildered, Tilly sat turning her bandaged face first in one direction then in the other.

"Spare your wraps," invited Betsey, pleasantly. She looked across the fields to the south and saw Eleazar Herr approaching with his long stride, and down the road to the east and saw six Erlenbaughs walking in procession, and up the road to the west and saw William Hershey's heavily laden buggy. If she was not mistaken Mary was in it and the baby and the little boys.

Her heart swelled; William's approach removed her last lingering sense of wrong-doing. It had been delightful to have Tilly hang upon her words, it had been thrilling to hold the Improved New Mennonite congregation spellbound; now she would have both pleasures in one. She would make these people sad and then how happy! The muscles of her arms tingled as though preparing for dramatic gestures.

"Wait once a little," she said, addressing Tilly. "Then I will begin again in the beginning."

'LIJAH

BY EDGAR VALENTINE SMITH

From *Harper's*

FORTUNE had long since ceased to smile on the last master of Holmacres. Then, suddenly, with the advent of the strangers and the coincident creation of 'Lijah, came, too, the visit of the angels.

The two strangers—being strangers—of course, knew nothing of the evil days that had befallen Judge Holmsted, nor were they particularly interested, since their mission concerned not the fortunes, either good or ill, of others but the betterment of their own. What they knew concerning the Judge and Holmacres—other than the fact that the two were intimately connected with the business which was bringing them to the place—was furnished by the aged Negro, who, with his ramshackle surrey and ancient nag, eked out a precarious existence driving occasional transients about the countryside. They had found him at the railway station in Wynnesborough, the county seat, and he had driven them along the five miles of deep-rutted road that stretched from the town to Holmacres. Being old, he was naturally garrulous.

For a long time he had sat fidgeting on the front seat of the vehicle, one ancient ear cocked rearward, listening to the unfamiliar accent of the strangers' speech. Finally, during a lull in their conversation, curiosity overpowered him and he half-faced about.

"'Scuse me, gen'lemens," he observed, ingratiatingly, "I don't mean no hahm by astin' it, but—you all is Yankees, ain't you?"

"Northerners—yes," one of them answered, smiling. "Why do you ask?"

"Yessuh. I thought so. You jus' don't talk like white folks—I *means* like *us's* white folks, Boss."

The stranger who had answered the query—the younger and less grave-appearing of the two—smiled again. "We'd heard so much of your Southern hospitality that we thought we'd come down and see what it is like."

"Hawspitality? Well, suhs, you is comin' to de place wheah it was invented at—when you comes to see de Judge."

Then the old man—product of a bygone day and still living in the memory of its glories—described the hospitality of Holmacres as it had been and as he still saw it. It was the most fertile plantation in the country, and its owner, Judge Holmsted, by odds the richest man, the most learned lawyer, the noblest gentleman, and the most open-handed host who ever breathed. His house was the finest that had ever been built; he set the most sumptuous table in the land; niggers fought for the privilege of working for him, even accepting the humblest tasks merely for the honour of being counted among the Judge's retinue. Judge Holmsted, to sum it up, was real "quality"; not like some of the trash which had sprung up with the last generation.

Thus the strangers were prepared in a measure for the picture which greeted them a few moments later: a grove of broad-topped live oaks, with the house in the near distance, a mansion of cement-walled, slate-roofed dignity, with the huge-columned, two-storied veranda reaching in stately welcome across its entire front. And as they stepped from the conveyance and came up the cape-jasmine-bordered walk, another picture was limned before them: a man well past threescore who had risen from his chair. He had removed his broad-brimmed hat, baring a mane of iron-gray hair, and now stood, despite the dingy frock coat that he wore, a figure as imposing as one of his own Ionic columns, courteously expectant at the visitors' approach.

The young stranger introduced his companion and himself. They were from the North, as he had explained to the ancient driver, and their business was that of timberland investors. One of their agents had sent reports of hardwood acreage adjacent to the Tombigbee, and they were making a personal trip of inspection. They wished to find a place—a boarding or lodging house, perhaps—closer to the river than the county

seat. Did Judge Holmsted know of such a place? They would be in the vicinity for several days.

Masters of Holmacres, since that first one who had erected a mansion in what was at that time a wilderness, had been famed for their hospitality. Nor had they been content with the thought that the neighbouring gentry only should be the recipients of their bounty, for that first one, a little strangely perhaps for one of cavalier forbears, had caused to be carved beneath the broad fire mantel in the central hall this inscription:

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Judge Holmsted was of that breed. "I couldn't think of letting you gentlemen stay anywhere but here." He spoke with a soft slurring of r's and a dropping of final g's which any attempt to put into print serves only to distort and make grotesque. "You must do me the honour of becoming my guests during your stay."

The older stranger demurred. "Why . . . that's awfully kind of you, Judge. But we really couldn't take advantage of your hosp——"

"You'll be taking no advantage at all, sir." There was no hint of subservience in the way the Judge said "sir." It was the courteous form of address toward strangers which had been the custom during his youth. "On the contrary, you'll really be doing me a favour. I'm an old man, gentlemen"—his smile would have won them had they really been hesitant at accepting his hospitality—"a little lonely at times, and I like company. And visitors, nowadays, are rare."

The strangers accepted the invitation with suspicious readiness. They hailed the ancient driver of the surrey, who had remained waiting in the driveway and who now brought in their luggage. For just a moment Judge Holmsted seemed ever so slightly embarrassed, a slight flush mantled his cheeks. And then, without stopping to think what it might mean, he created—'Lijah.

"Be seated, gentlemen," he invited, "while I call someone to bring in your baggage." He took a step toward the broad doorway. "'Lijah!" he called. There was no answer. He called again, more loudly, "'Lijah!" and still no one answered. Frowning, he walked to the end of the veranda, and peering

about, shouted the name for the third time, with the same result as before.

He turned apologetically to his guests. "That trifling rascal," he explained, "is never about, particularly at this season of the year, when I need him." He glanced about for the driver of the surrey, but the old man had gone. "Come with me, gentlemen." Taking up their luggage, he led them within the house.

Though his welcome to the strangers had been extended in all sincerity (he had not been a Holmsted had it been otherwise) their coming brought a problem—another one—to the Judge. And, somehow, in his declining years life seemed to hold little else save problems, and all of them as yet unsolved.

Time had been when Holmacres threw its doors wide open to the countryside, for its masters had lived in the traditions handed down by its founder. Even now Judge Holmsted, daydreaming at times, permitted his thoughts to stray back to the days when servants swarmed about the place, when there were stableboys who seemed actually to get underfoot, and house boys who fairly haunted the guests, eager to be of the slightest service. The big stable had contained riding and driving horses, which were not merely to be had for the asking but were almost forced on one. There had been dogs for the fall quail shooting, and master and guests had ridden to hounds. But now . . . it seemed that there remained little of misfortune that could happen. For of the hospitality for which Holmacres had been famous there existed but a shell, a shell so fragile that it might be crushed at any moment. Pity, too, that he, the last of his race, should not maintain the heritage which was his!

Had he belonged to that modern school which placed the mere god of commercialism above neighbourliness, he might still have kept himself from actual want. But a friend in financial straits had come to him, and it was a neighbourly act to indorse a note for a large sum of money. It was a hideous fate, though, that caused the friend to die, leaving an estate heavily encumbered, and forced the Judge to pay the indebtedness by mortgaging the home of his ancestors.

Even before this, though, the soil of Holmacres, planted for generations exclusively to cotton, had been growing less and less fruitful. Judge Holmsted had seen the yield dwindle

year by year. He had divided the plantations into small farms for tenants. Then the northern exodus had begun, one by one the tenants had left, until now, with the few hired "hands" that he could secure, he was cultivating perhaps one-tenth of his tillable lands.

Still, for a time he had not experienced want. His salary as judge of the circuit—which position he had graced for thirty years—while not munificent had enabled him to make a pretence of the hospitality that had brought fame to Holm-acres.

Then a new order of things came to pass. Politics was played with the precision—and the heart—of a machine. Those in control of the political destinies of the counties composing the circuit banded themselves together—that is, all of them save Judge Holmsted. Old-fashioned jurist that he was, he refused to lend himself to what he considered certain questionable pre-election machinations. Then the ultimatum went forth: he could submit or take the consequences—political oblivion. He accepted the gage, for he came not only of a hospitable but of a combative breed.

Hitherto his mere announcement that he would be a candidate for nomination at the Democratic primaries had assured his re-election. Now, for the first time in his life, he entered upon a vigorous campaign. He travelled incessantly about the various counties of his circuit, spending, legitimately, of his slender means. He made countless speeches, he met hundreds of friends and received—promises.

He returned to the practice of law in Wynnesborough, but it seemed that his methods, like himself, had become old-fashioned. Friends insisted that he retained too much conscience to compete with more modern and, in certain instances, as he maintained, less ethical procedures than met his ideals.

"The practice of law," he had said once, when the matter came up, "is an honourable profession. It was never intended that it should degenerate into a display of legal acrobatics."

Clients were few and those who came were not always of the soundest financial standing. But there was always more or less bickering and litigation between the poorer class of hill-farmers, and some of these brought their troubles to

Judge Holmsted. They paid their accounts in various ways: some brought small lots of cotton, others poultry and pigs, while one, an aged bachelor recluse of uncertain temper, just before his death had willed to the judge forty acres of land. This, people inclined to be humorous asserted, was in the way of a subtle revenge, for the Judge, suing for the old man, had lost his case, and the hill forty, as it was known, was not considered worth the tax payments.

There had been excessively poor crops. Years, too, when the cotton raised had not paid operating expenses. Twice the Judge had borrowed money—which he still owed—in advance on his crops. And the present outlook, with the late spring rains and cultivation sadly hampered, was now worse than ever.

Even his plainly dwindling income did not cause him to forsake his ideals. These, he insisted, one must cling to, even though he go down with them. Certain other changes, though, had forced themselves on him. Horses and other stock had been sold, since the plantation would not longer support them in numbers. Now all that remained were a few work mules and the Judge's own mount, Grover Cleveland. Servants were dispensed with until all of them, save one, had gone. She stayed.

Christened Alabama, she was variously called Miz' 'Bama, Sis 'Bama, and 'Bama, the form of address depending on the degree of intimacy she permitted the speaker, the Judge and those of her race whom she considered her equals using the last named. She had remained at Holmacres after all the others had left, though her wage was more often a mirage than a reality. Latterly, continued urging by certain of her friends that she leave Judge Holmsted's service and go to the city, where her skill as a cook would return her a fabulous income, always met with scornful rebuff.

"But he ain't payin' you nothin'," the tempter would insist.

"'Sposin' he ain't?" 'Bama, hands on her ample hips, would face the speaker. "You is fergittin' somep'm, ain't you? What 'bout my social p'sition?"

Usually this ended the discussion, for 'Bama, born and reared in the atmosphere of Holmacres, was the recognized leader of her people in the vicinity. No wedding was complete without her in the rôle of general adviser and master of

ceremonies, nor was any funeral fittingly held without her presence to lend due solemnity to the occasion. But sometimes argument failed to convince those who tried to tempt her. Then 'Bama would fall back on flat refusal.

"Go 'way, niggus!" she would command. "I wouldn't leave 'is heah plantation foh—foh a *hund'ed dolluhs a yeah!*"

So she remained steadfast at Holmacres as general house factotum for the Judge. It was 'Bama who tactfully reminded him, at those times when the larder became more depleted than usual, that supplies were needed. And it was she who, out of the merest nothing, could serve food fit for a king's banquet. It was 'Bama who attended to the laundry—carefully washing the Judge's shirts to save the frayed cuffs as much as possible—and looked after the scanty supply of household linen. She darned Judge Holmsted's socks, saw that his shiny coat was occasionally brushed, and kept him generally from being out at elbows in the matter of clothing.

Her manifold duties had brought her to the front of the house that afternoon when the Judge summoned the mythical 'Lijah. For a moment she listened in open-mouthed amazement. Then understanding of a sort came to her, as she peeped between the curtains and saw the strangers. For some reason Judge Holmsted wanted it understood that a personage who answered—or should answer—to the name of 'Lijah belonged about the place. And any undertaking that the Judge set on foot was worth seeing to its conclusion. While she lacked the Judge's creative ability, she could, at least, embellish that which he had made. Her first attempt was in evidence that evening when she served a supper that would have tickled the palate of a gourmand.

"Judge," she remarked, taking the privilege of an old servant, "does you know, suh, 'at triflin' 'Lijah ain't got back till yit?"

Judge Holmsted choked momentarily; he seemed to experience sudden difficulty with his food, but he recovered his self-control instantly.

"He hasn't?" he demanded, sternly. "Won't he ever learn to come in on time? Tell him that I wish to speak with him the moment he gets in."

"Yessuh. I knows wheah he's at. He's down to 'at river, settin' out catfish lines."

'Bama had cast the die. Judge Holmsted's creation of 'Lijah had been the result of a sudden—and now inexplicable—impulse; probably, upon reflection, he would have made no further reference to him. But 'Bama had given entity to the myth; with a word or two she had made of it an outstanding personality: a house servant who, by implication at least, took whatsoever liberties he chose.

And suddenly the realization came to the Judge that his creation had been nothing short of inspiration. With the present state of affairs at Holmacres, numberless things were sure to happen which might cause embarrassment to one who sought to fill the rôle of dutiful host; and the lack of a perfect hospitality, in many instances, could be blamed on the erring—though mythical—'Lijah.

"He's one of the older servants about the place," the Judge explained casually to his guests. "Does pretty much as he pleases."

He followed this with a laughing remark about 'Lijah's fondness for fishing. It was almost impossible to keep a Negro and a river apart when the catfish were biting.

"I'd like very much to see 'Lijah." It was the younger stranger speaking. "I've read so many stories dealing with Southern plantation life—and especially the old family servants—that I've often wanted to see one of them. And your man, 'Lijah, seems to be typical."

"Oh, he'll be about the place—off and on," the Judge assured, carelessly. "And if you're interested in types, sir, you'll probably like 'Lijah."

Thus for the moment he dismissed 'Lijah. But 'Bama, apparently, was determined not to let the errant one off so easily, for, later, as the Judge and his guests entered the high-ceilinged living room, where portraits of earlier Holmsteds gave greeting from their oval walnut frames, she came to the doorway.

"Judge," she observed, meaningly, "I don't s'pect you'll hahdly find no seegars. I seed 'Lijah sof'-footin' it round 'at sec'ta'y whilse I was dustin' 'is mawnin'."

Mechanically, Judge Holmsted's eyes sought the old rose-wood secretary in one corner of the room, but before he could speak the younger stranger broke in with:

"Oh, that's all right, Judge." He was laughing heartily

as he extended a cigar case. "Take one of these. So, he 'borrows' your cigars, does he? I've simply *got* to see him."

The strangers spoke of their business in the vicinity. The timber which they wished to inspect lay some miles away and, although their actual cruising of it would be done on foot, they would need some kind of conveyance to take them to their starting point. They supposed an automobile could be obtained in Wynnesborough?

Guests beneath Holmacres' roof had never been compelled to hire conveyances. It would have been unthinkable. The Judge explained that the swamp roads were in such condition that an automobile would be impracticable. He had never bought a car himself for this reason. His guests must use one of the numerous horses about the place. He would have 'Lijah hitch one of them to the buggy. It would be the very thing for their trips.

When one of them, giving as an excuse their long railroad journey, suggested retiring, Judge Holmsted, first ascertaining that 'Lijah was nowhere to be found, led them up the broad, winding stairway to their room. He lighted the kerosene lamp. Then, carelessly turning back the bed covering, he stopped in sudden horror. There was only one sheet on the bed!

He turned, his face crimsoning, to his guests. They had seen. "That trifling, worthless——" he began, and stopped. "It's 'Lijah—of course, gentlemen—as usual," he said, helplessly. "Come with me."

He led them to another room—his own—which for more than forty years no one save himself had occupied. This, he knew, would be in readiness. It always was, for he was fastidious about certain things, among them fresh bed linen. 'Bama attended to that.

"Just leave your shoes outside the door, gentlemen," he said in parting. "'Lijah will polish them."

He found 'Bama in the kitchen. Her answer to his question about the sheets brought home to him dishearteningly the scarcity of household linen.

In the library he picked up the latest issue of the Wynnesborough *Clarion*, a weekly newspaper published in the county seat, but he could not fasten his thoughts on the printed page.

There were weightier things to be considered. Plainly, the visit of the strangers—should it prove of some duration—meant a still further drain on the slender resources of Holmacres. Since he had promised his guests the use of a horse, they would have to take Grover Cleveland. The Judge sighed. All of the work-mules were sadly needed, but he must use one of them for his daily trips to his office. By waiting until the strangers had left every morning, though, and remaining at his office till he was sure they had returned, they need never know of the subterfuge he had resorted to for their convenience.

Another matter claimed his attention: the disquieting letter—rather the letter that spelled doom—which had come that morning. The interest payment on the mortgage would be due shortly, and the letter stated brusquely that the mortgage had passed into other hands. Hereafter all payments must be met at maturity. Covetous eyes, Judge Holmsted knew, had long looked toward Holmacres. Once or twice he had succeeded in having his payments extended, but now . . . alien owners—people with no reverence for its traditions—would come into possession of the place. The thought was bitter—unbearable.

Once—more than twoscore years ago—the Judge had hoped that an heir might succeed to his name and estate. But with the passing of the one who could have made this a reality, this hope, too, had died. Better so, he comforted himself now; far better that the odium for failure to live up to Holmacres' heritage be his than that it should have been shifted to a son who would have borne his name.

He mounted the stairs. Just outside the door of his guests' room he found their shoes.

And that night—and for succeeding nights—he slept in the bed that had but one sheet.

But his guests at the breakfast table next morning probably thought that his only solicitude lay in planning for their well-being. He was sorry that, owing to 'Lijah's shiftlessness—the black rascal!—he had been compelled to make such short shift for them on the previous night. He hoped they had rested well.

After breakfast they found Grover Cleveland, freshly curried and rubbed till his coat shone like satin, hitched to

the buggy ready for their trip. The vehicle itself bore signs of recent washing; the harness, too, one would have said, had been freshly oiled.

"I wonder how we're going to begin talking business to a man who treats us like members of his family," the older stranger said as he climbed into the vehicle. "We'll have to use a lot of diplomacy."

"We'll just remember," the younger man reminded, "that we've come several hundred miles to secure a property at as favourable terms to ourselves as possible. And that business is business—always."

Judge Holmsted waited only long enough to see his guests off. Then he walked to one of the fields where a Negro was ploughing.

"Eph," he said, "I'll have to be using the mule for a few days."

"But, Judge, suh!" Eph stared, gaping. "Dis grass! It's plum' ram-pant since 'em las' rains, suh. Can't you see it's jus' nachelly chokin' de cotton to death?"

The Judge could see, plainly enough. The spindling stalks of cotton were struggling weakly through mazes of Johnson and Bermuda grasses. But he saw something else, too; something that Eph, being a recent comer, could not have seen or, seeing, could not have understood: there were guests beneath Judge Holmsted's roof.

It was the first time that he had ridden a mule since he was a boy. Often then, in a spirit of mischief, he had done so. Things had changed now. Horses . . . dogs . . . servants . . . gone. Everything! Everything save the will to be a hospitable host.

At the little bank in town he was courteously but firmly refused an additional loan. The bank officials liked the Judge—and sympathized with him—but his previous loans were still outstanding. And it was doubtful—exceedingly doubtful—that his crop that year would pay the cost of raising it.

But that evening, as he sat with his guests on the broad veranda, he was solicitous only as to the result of their investigations. Were they finding the hardwood timber of good quality? And was it in sufficient quantity to justify them in purchasing and logging it? He hoped this might

be the case; he was looking forward with a great deal of pleasure to welcoming them as permanent neighbours.

He proved himself to be a raconteur of rare ability and charm. The grave-faced stranger seemed fascinated by his stories as he spoke of the days when steamboats from Mobile plied the Tombigbee daily. Now there were only one or two boats weekly. But then many were the gay parties that made the round trip. There was always a Negro orchestra on board and stately men and beautiful women, after the dining saloon had been cleared, danced the schottische and the polka until the early hours of morning. More than once, too, a steamer had been forced to pull in to the bank while two young blades went ashore and settled their hot-blooded quarrels according to the code. Judge Holmsted sighed reminiscently. Those had been wonderful days.

The air was soft with the softness of Southern nights. There came to them, as they sat there, the odour of cape jasmine and the fainter but more caressing scent of honeysuckle. A light breeze rustled the leaves of the water oaks, shimmering now by the light of the full moon in a mantle of pure silver dust.

The younger stranger lighted a cigar and leaned back in his chair, sighing restfully. "Two weeks of this," he said, "and I shouldn't want to go home. You Southern planters lead an enviable life, Judge."

"It's enchanting," his companion assented.

"We like it, sir—some of us," the Judge admitted. He spoke with a tinge of regret of former neighbours who, one by one, had been lured away by the cities. Many fine old places had been left to the care of tenants and had speedily gone to ruin. But the Holmsteds, being lovers of the land, had always lived close to it. "Maybe we are more firmly rooted in the soil than some of the others were," the Judge said.

"It seems to me, Judge," the grave-faced stranger offered, "that you have a wonderful place here for a stock farm. Aren't these native grasses—I believe you call them Johnson and Bermuda—good for grazing?"

"Excellent, sir."

"That's just what I'd do with this place if I owned it," the younger stranger broke in. He was more outspoken than

his elderly companion. "I'd divide it into pastures with good fences, build up-to-date barns and pig houses, and stock it with blooded cattle and hogs. You've your grasses for spring and summer. And I understand that those river canebrakes make fine winter grazing."

"I may try something of the kind next year," the Judge admitted. "I've been thinking for some time of venturing along that line."

Venturing! Blooded cattle and hogs! Fences and barns, when the burning question was one of bare existence! Not that he had never had dreams. Many times he had pictured his broad lands dotted with droves of sleek cattle and herds of swine, with an income assured that would again crown Holmacres with its fair name for hospitality. But the realization of this dream would require money. . . .

It was the next morning that a mocking bird, nesting in a near-by tree, awakened the serious-faced stranger with its early song. Arising, he crept softly to the window and stood listening. And suddenly, as he looked out, he started and stared fixedly. Then a dull red flush mounted slowly to his cheeks. He withdrew from the window even more softly than he had approached it and lay down again without wakening his companion.

But that morning brought consternation to Judge Holmsted. Modern plumbing had not been installed at Holmacres, and he remembered suddenly that his guests must shave. And there was one item that he had overlooked.

"I suppose, gentlemen," he remarked at the breakfast table, "that 'Lijah—you see I have to keep close check on him—brought you hot water?"

They admitted that he had not.

"He'll be the death of me yet," the Judge said, hopelessly, "if I don't wring his neck soon. He's getting more worthless every day."

The young stranger laughed. "You're more lenient with your servants, Judge, than we'd be in the North. They must attend to their duties there or they're discharged."

"But it's different with us, sir." The Judge smiled. "Take 'Lijah, for example. Been on the place all of his life—going on fifty years. I couldn't get rid of him. If I were

to discharge him he'd refuse to stay discharged. He'd simply come sneaking back and I'd have to feed him."

The younger man's interest in 'Lijah was more intrigued than ever. Returning with his companion earlier than usual one evening, he sought out 'Bama. He was eager, he said, to see 'Lijah. But that worthy, as usual, failed to answer even when 'Bama, standing on the kitchen porch, called his name lustily several times.

"When does he sleep?" the stranger asked. "He doesn't seem to be around the place of nights."

"Sleep? Him sleep? You neentuh worry 'bout 'at, Cap'n. All 'Lijah needs is a sof' place on de shady side of a tree when dey's somep'm needs doin' round de house. He'll 'tend to de sleepin'. Dey's jus' two things 'Lijah's good foh: he de sleep-lovin'es' an' de catfish-ketchin'es' nigguh you eveh seed."

"He's typical all right," the stranger laughed. "And I must see him—I've simply *got* to see him before I leave."

Judge Holmsted found himself gradually forming a sneaking fondness for his creation. Maybe it was because he was unconsciously bringing into being an ideal. For 'Lijah was just the shiftless, work-dodging, cigar-pilfering type that the Judge would have loved—the kind that would run rabbits with his bird dogs—provided the Judge could afford the dogs—or slip his pack of fox hounds out on cold autumn nights—if the Judge should ever own a pack—for surreptitious 'coon and 'possum hunting. Yes . . . that would be just like 'Lijah. Indolent, grumbling always, complaining of a mis'ry in his side; absolutely dependent, thoroughly undependable—and utterly likable. In short, he would be perfect. The Judge even caught himself at times murmuring aloud, "That trifling black rascal!"

But such things—oh, well!—they were dreams, visions that an old man was seeing.

As the strangers showed no signs of terminating their visit, 'Bama, with visions of a rapidly depleted larder, began to experience a real concern. With only the Judge and herself to care for, she could have made shift of some sort. Maybe a hint to Judge Holmsted of the real state of affairs might not prove unavailing. So she tried, very diplomatically, one evening at the supper table, to sound a warning.

"Judge, suh," she remarked, meaningly, "'Lijah is been 'mongst de chickens agi'n."

"What of it?" Judge Holmsted smiled on his guests. 'Lijah, he explained, was probably giving a party for some of his friends. "A few chickens, more or less, don't matter, do they, 'Bama?"

"But dese is *fattenin'* chickens, suh; de onlies' ones I had left."

"You don't mind 'Lijah entertaining his friends, do you?" the talkative stranger asked.

"Not gen'ally; no, suh. But he's been gittin' entirely *too* entertainin' lately."

"Doesn't he catch enough fish for his feasts?"

"Yessuh; he ketches plenty fish. But catfish, you knows, is just a nigguh's reg'lar eatin' victuals. Dey uses de chickens kind o' foh dessert."

"You must find his parties something of a drain on your resources."

"'Tain't no pahty, suh, he's givin' 'is time. It's just a shindig—a plain shindig."

The Judge explained that a shindig was a dance.

"Dance?" The younger stranger seemed amazed. "An old man like 'Lijah?"

"Him dance?" 'Bama gave answer. "Just de thoughts of a fiddle'll send him shufflin' his feets 'cross de flo'—right now! Age ain't purified him none."

'Bama, strictly orthodox in her religious beliefs, was patently outraged by this latest of the hapless 'Lijah's escapades, for as she left the room they heard her muttering:

"An' him wid gran'chillun! I's gwine to have him churchd—I *sho'* is!"

Between themselves the strangers discussed the business which had brought them to Holmacres.

"It's showing up even better than the estimate we received," the older man said one evening.

"One of the richest deposits I ever saw," the other admitted.

When they went to their room he complained of not being in the mood for sleeping. The rays of that Southern moon, he said, must have affected him. He felt restless; he'd walk round a bit.

Five minutes later he returned quietly to the house,

mounted the stairs softly, undressed silently, and went to bed.

The next morning as they seated themselves at the breakfast table, 'Bama's voice, raised in loud and indignant self-communion, was heard in the kitchen.

"Co'se, *he* don't keer! Out dere diggin' yearthworms to go fishin' wid an' lettin' all 'em cows an' ca'fs git together! Don't make no diffe'nce to him if us *don't* have no milk foh de cawfee."

It was much better, 'Bama reasoned, to blame this lack on 'Lijah than be compelled to admit that their only cow, bitten by a snake two days previously, had died.

But the younger stranger, usually so talkative when reference was made to 'Lijah, was strangely silent now.

Another day, as the visitors were dressing in their room, the more taciturn one spoke of their business. "I wonder," he asked, "if the Judge knows anything about the value of the property?"

"Oh, yes!" The younger man's loquaciousness had returned. "He knows all about it. I was talking to 'Lijah only yesterday"—he made sudden pretence of searching for something in his travelling bag—"and he said the Judge had received several offers for the property, but that he wasn't eager to sell. Saving it as a sort of nest egg, I was given to understand. In fact, 'Lijah said——"

"So, you've seen him?" At the first mention of the name, the serious-faced stranger had seemed surprised—almost startled. Then a look of comprehension—of complete and sympathetic understanding—lighted his grave features. And, as he smiled softly, tiny wrinkles creased the corners of his eyes. "What's 'Lijah like?"

"Just what I expected. Quite a character. Unique. He let me understand how these Southern planters feel about parting with any of their landholdings. From what 'Lijah said, the Judge probably wouldn't even name a figure if we were to approach him on the matter. And don't forget that it would be fatal even to think of trying any haggling or 'jewin' down.' He doesn't want for money, with this plantation bringing in a steady income and all the servants he needs. That's not even considering what he gets out of his law practice. Now, I'd suggest——"

"Just a moment!"

At the interruption the voluble young stranger looked up from his travelling bag. Something that he saw—maybe it was the quiet smile in his companion's eyes—sent an answering flash into his own.

"We're partners," the serious-faced man reminded him, "and ought to be frank with each other. Just how long have you known the actual conditions here? That 'Lijah is a myth? That it's the Judge who has been polishing our shoes——"

"And washing that damned old buggy!" The younger man's face was crimson. "And letting us have his saddle horse—the only one on the place—while he rode a mule! Think of it! That hospitable old aristocrat! Poverty-stricken! My God, I——" He stammered and stopped.

"We both understand, I guess." The quiet-spoken man extended his hand, which was grasped in silence.

That evening they announced to Judge Holmsted that, having finished their inspection, they were ready to return home. After thanking the Judge for his hospitality, the younger stranger broached the matter of business. They were not only timberland investors, it appeared, but dealt also in other property. But, as he tried diplomatically to come to the subject uppermost in his mind, he seemed strangely ill at ease for one accustomed to business deals of magnitude. And finally, instead of the tactful approach which he had planned, he came very bluntly to the point.

"There's a deposit of mica on that hill forty of yours, Judge," he said simply. "Would you care to sell it?"

That old hill forty! Hope blossomed faintly in Judge Holmsted's breast. The strangers might—it was barely possible that they might—pay enough for that rocky, worthless waste to take care of that threatening interest note. If so, he was assured tenancy of his home for another six months. After that . . .

But the stranger was speaking again. "We realize, Judge, that, between gentlemen, there should be no haggling over such a thing as price. We've talked it over, my friend and I, and have decided to offer you just what the property is worth to us."

That faint gleam of hope flickered and died. Evidently the strangers considered the hill forty almost valueless.

Foolish! Just an old man dreaming . . . Holmacres . . . home of his ancestors . . . home of hospitality. . . .

He heard the stranger's voice again. He was speaking rapidly. "We can offer you, for all rights to the land, fifty thousand dollars."

Fifty thousand dollars! One watching Judge Holmsted closely might have noticed a sudden throbbing of the blue veins at his temples; might have detected a slight tremor in the hand that went up, trying unconcernedly to stroke his gray goatee; might even have observed his other hand grip tightly for a moment the arm of the chair on which it rested. Maybe, in that brief instant, the Judge saw a dream fulfilled: broad fields fenced to pasture and dotted with sleek cattle and fat swine; bottom lands, yellow with ripening corn; barns and outhouses, as befitted a vast estate; Holmacres, with its doors once more flung wide. . . .

But whatever might have been his emotions, he gave no evidence of them, as he answered with his usual grave courtesy:

"So far as I know, gentlemen, the matter can be arranged on that basis."

When the strangers left next morning he expressed regret that he could not accompany them to town, since urgent matters necessitated his presence on the plantation. They could leave Grover Cleveland and the buggy at the livery stable in Wynnesborough. He would send 'Lijah for them.

After they had gone he seated himself before the old rose-wood secretary. Maybe he dreamed again . . . of quail hunting during the crisp months of fall . . . of fox hounds in their kennels . . . of servants. Servants?

Suddenly he drew up a sheet of paper and began writing in a firm, precise script. And when he had finished he scanned what he had written:

WANTED: Negro house servant, male, aged fifty, or thereabouts, for light work in plantation home. Must be willing to answer to the name of Elijah. Apply B. L. H. care *Clarion*.

A RIVER COMBINE—PROFESSIONAL

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

From Argosy All-Story

I DON'T know 'f I eveh told you about Stepping May or not. She came down the river awhile back in a clinker-built skiff. She was so blamed pretty it was a wonder they ever let her come down the banks onto old Mississip' at all; but theh she was, big as life—about five foot seven tall, and her lips straight and resentful, but her eyes twinkling. You see, a lady lots of times keeps her jaw set square when she'd rather be smiling two foot wide. Lots of men can't let a lady grin without thinkin' she's soft on 'em.

The first test I seen of Stepping May was along about Hickman, Kentucky, one of those mean, miserable days when the autumn northers begin to whisper an' growl down out o' the ice cap mountains. Hadn't begun to rain yet, but hit was mean. I was into my green cabin boat which I bought off a feller who built it up the Alleghany in N'York State to trip down to N'Orleans, but found the Ohio so big he neveh had the grit to see old Mississip' at all. Theh I was, jes' plumb comfy, an' this blamed gal come along—pretty as a picture, an' jes' about as accommodating.

She hearn my fiddle talking along, so she pulled up an' hailed. I stepped outside, not thinkin' what I was doing, an' course, the minute that wind hit my warm fiddle strings, snp! An' I had two broken.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she said, the way a girl does when she knows what she's talking about. "I didn't mean to do that!"

She was cold, her cheeks red, an' her hands reddish. You know how a man feels when he knows he ought to ask a lady something, but expects she'll sure miscue 'im. I had a good

cabin, warm, two chairs—comfortable! I didn't know what to say, so she said hit herself. If only ladies'd speak first their feelings, hit'd be lots nicer, wouldn't it, for men? Lots an' lots of times a man passes up something he'd like to do, probably he'd oughta do, jes' account of him bein' 'fraid a lady'd be insulted, or like that.

"Mr. Man," she said, her eyes sparkling, "I'm 'most froze to death! Won't yo' let me stand by yo' fire an' warm?"

Why, say, I just told that gal she could have my whole blamed shanty boat if hit 'd 'commodate her any. She laughed, and come aboard, dropping a bowline on my bumper cleat, trailing the skiff alongside.

I give her my fiddling chair, but she took t'other one. We sat theh while she warmed her red hands an' I strung up my bow. When I 'gun to play, she turned her head to listen—sharp! Naturally, I ain't much of a talker, far as the ladies is concerned, but they don't embarrass me none when I'm playing, which helps me forget how pretty they is, or something, I don't know what.

She listened so blamed int'rested I was wondering, for the music was "Caving Bends." Yo' know that piece, which started 'way back yonder, which all the riveh fiddlers has played just natural, till now everybody knows hit? Played right, yo' can hear the water suckling an' sawing along the bend, an' then the lumping-lumping down as the ground falls in, a tree swings out and falls a splashing, and all good music, which you can dance by.

"Oh, what's that?" she asked.

I knowed right away she wasn't a riveh gal, but like me, from up the banks, though more recent. So I told her "Caving Bends." Then I told her about some more river music: "Cyclone," "Crossing Ripples," "Steamboat," "Spring Birds," "Cold Winds," "Sandbar Whispers"—theh's a lot of those funny musics that jes' imitate the way the old Mississip' sounds one time an' anotheh, which anybody could play if he's good at slidin' notes an' picking an' knows the riveh.

"Riveh music!" she whispered. "Why—why, I didn't know they had music like that! You know—I dance!"

While I played "Crossing Ripples," she danced, too. Lawse, that gal was steppin'! I jes' looked at her. She was

professional, I could see that—but more than professional, too, somehow. She had to 'dapt her stepping to the music, finding which was best, if shuffling and sliding or tap-tap or lifting and floating. Seemed like I played twict as good as I'd eveh played in my life before.

My cabin was six foot four high, an' there was about eight by ten foot square she could dance in; hit wan't any too much, but she used all the floor an' most of the roof, so to speak. She'd dance a round or two, an' then she'd sit an' ask me questions. That was about the busiest afternoon I remember, and 'fore I knowed hit, night had come, closing down on the riveh like a door, taking me right by surprise!

"Oh, it's dark!" she cried, waking up.

I jumped out, give a look around, an' then pulled for the west bank. Lucky hit was the foot of a long bend, an' I anchored in the eddy at the head of the bar—I don't know which bar, either. Somewhere below Putney Bend, anyhow, an' she stood nervous and doubtful as she looked out into that black night.

"We better cook supper," I told her. "You've a tarpaulin so's you can sleep into your skiff?"

"Oh, yes!" she said. "I sleep into it."

I lighted a big round burner lamp I had, and we stretched her tarpaulin over the hoops, for it seemed like rain was right theh. Then we cooked supper on my oil stove, she being mighty good at hot bread, while I ain't no slouch cooking meat. Course, I'm one of those people that always has a plenty to eat on board, even if I am a fiddler. I made good money. I'd come down the rivers just so I wouldn't be pestifered by neighbours and anybody, practising my music all day an' all night, too, 'f I wanted to. We had a regular meal, which she ate of hearty, as I did, both being right hungry after all the work that afternoon—work we loved, but work, at that.

Afteh supper we cleared the table, washed the dishes—a man sure goes low down, leaving dishes to wash, if he's in a shanty boat. Women can do things like that, but if a man does it, soon he ain't shaving, he don't take his cold bath, an' fustest he knows he's shiftless, no 'count, ragged, dirty, miserable.

I wondered who this girl was, course. She was brave—

Lordy, but it took nerve for her to come down that coiling old running lake if she didn't have to! But she wasn't the kind of a girl anybody asks questions of, free and easy. When she danced she found her skirt too tight, and slipped it off so casual and easy that in trying to run the music right I didn't really notice she was in knickerbockers till afterward. Course, professional people are thataway. In no time we knowed we'd be teaming it.

We both were tired after supper. I stirred up the soft coal I'd found in a tow barge wreck on a sandbar, opening up the front gates in the fireplace stove I had for a heater. She sat into a low rocking chair, and I kittering across from her in an old armchair I'd picked up in a drift pile. I'd relined my shanty cabin with building paper, but some curling wisps of cold circled around from the north wind so the fire felt mighty comfortable.

"How come hit you're a shanty boater?" she asked, quick as that.

Course, nobody asks questions like that down the rivers if you ain't off the bank, or one of them writin' fellers or a sneakin' detective. I couldn't answer first off. A man don't tell even a pretty girl some things, and I mout say, specially a pretty girl. I knewed, though, I'd tell her when I'd laid tongue to words quiet enough to use.

"Why," I answered, careless like, after a minute, "I jes' come down. I jes' took my fiddle an' come down——"

"No, you didn't!" She shook her head. "It wa'n't thataway. You know theory. You've taken lessons—real lessons, on the violin. Nobody who hadn't done that could play river music the way you do. Besides, you talk river talk like you learned it in school."

'Tain't no use trying to fool some women. I never met one I could fool. That's be'n my experience. Perhaps some'rs there's women I could hoodwink, but they ain't on old Mississip'!

"Course, I'm from up the bank," I admitted. "I just tripped away down same's anybody."

"Same as anybody!" she nodded. "That's so—I came because I couldn't stand bein' a dancing girl in a hick town! And you?"

"Why—why——" You know how a man don't talk of

some things when he has to, an' can't get out of it. "I couldn't stand being a fiddler in a hick town, when—when——"

I couldn't say it. Some things hurt too much to say it.

"I know!" she said. "Somebody thought more of good business than of good music?"

"Jes' so!" I told her. "You know some girls, they don't want a fellow, a sweetheart, a husband that don't know nothing but music, sort of no 'count in the chamber of commerce and on Main Street."

"Yes, suh!" she nodded. "I'd no right to ask you. I wanted to know, I had to know. I could tell you was white, honest—the way a good man is when he thinks he's lost out. Musicians, artists, writers—big ones, but undiscovered—always feel they're mean an' trifling beside of good money makers. You're thataway!"

I hadn't never looked at hit before the way she put it. I jes' knowed I had a powerful big ache down around my heart, where I'd felt like a humming bird looking into a big rose in those old days. Yes, suh. Now I saw that girl lookin' into the fire, her eyes full. She had a mighty powerful mouth and jaw, but she hadn't no way of controlling her eyes. They'd twinkle, and they'd fill up, the way they had, feeling sorry for me. I reckon just that one look I had at her face before that fire in the red light—I was obliged to save kerosene, an' she'd turned the light down, knowing it, even if I did have lots to eat on board. You see—well, course a man picks up eats down the rivers—a shoat here, a yearling there; maybe some chicks and so on, besides game, if he's anyways slick and don't givvadamn.

"Prenaux!" she said to me, the first I realized she knew my name. "I was sick of dancing in a hick town. You know those smart city kids, and those big-footed country goofs. They never saw me dance. All they saw was—was legs. So I came down the river! Prob'ly I was a fool, only I wasn't. No, indeed—— The first thing, in less'n ten days I heard your music——"

That's the way we found it down old Mississip'. Lots came down who don't neveh find what they aches for. Men trip down an' down, an' floats, rollin' along the bottom into the gulf at last. Women is thataway, too—young ones an' old ones. But I knowed a preacher once who'd lost his hold,

an' a business man who'd mixed in scandal, an' others what tried to lose themselves down the riveh—an' firstest they knowed the gates of happiness spread wide open for them.

Probably we understood each otheh that night as well as eveh we would. There wan't much talkin' an' explainin'. We jes' had hit in ouh hearts. She stepped back, swung the chair clear, an' stepped four five measures without any music but the voices of the riveh dark—which she heard, an' I heard. She opened the bow door, bowed a pretty curtsy to me, an' shut the wind out the cabin. I caught up a lantern to hand to her, but she had one of her own under the skiff tarpaulin hood. Lawse, but that were a cozy eddy that night!

Well, suh, next day we had breakfast togetheh. She read some music I had, all kinds that I'd picked up for my fiddling. Course, when I came on the riveh, if music wasn't classic I sort of despised hit. But I'd been growing careless. I'd took to admiring the music river fiddlers played, some of it awful to listen to, but always, two three measures, perhaps one piece would be right out of the river's heart. I'd learn that piece. I'd maybe have to smooth it up, for my ear, account of somebody not knowing how to run the times together, or maybe breaking the refrains or splitting up the melodies the way mountain fiddlers do. Well, anyhow, every fiddler fixes his music oveh, according to his notions, the way I did.

An' when we'd settled our breakfasts, resting around, I brought out the old fiddle to tighten up and tune the strings, an she stepped, exercising to take out the kinks the cold an' sleeping on the bottom of her skiff'd hooked into her knees an' joints. An' her dancin' scales was purtier 'n some steppin' of lots of heel-an'-toe folks.

May Gardner was sure wonderful, even in those days, and patient. If some step bothered her, she'd work at it, steady, minutes, hours till she had it to the lift and fall of a ripple, while I played the music she wanted, steady, oveh an' oveh again. I hadn't practised so much as I'd played. I used to let some hard places go. She made me go at those measures till my fingers and my bow'd walk through them, same as her dancing went through the swing, turn and change, the balance and the mark, the beat and the sway—— Lawse, man! Hit

wa'n't no work for me, but she'd toil along till she dropped into a chair, plumb wore out.

"Lucien!" she exclaimed, "you're so good to me. You don't know what it means—this chance to practise this-away!"

You'd think one day was like anotheh, down the reaches and bends. We had to drop down pretty well, account of winter coming on. I remember when the fresh meat was gone, and we was down to sowbelly and corn, for I'd neglected providing. We hadn't any money. I was looking along for a flock of shoats on a bar, or maybe a steer caved down at a riveh bank; you know what I mean. I'd be'n on the riveh so long, staying my appetite thataway, never careless or being caught, that prob'ly I didn't rightly think about hit, the way I should of. I told her I'd have to lift a pig.

"Lucien Prenaux!" she turned on me, hard and set. "You sha'n't!"

We had hit out. She'd rather starve 'n steal, she said, and I hadn't. She had her way. Course, one way it wa'n't none of her business how I found my grub. We weren't nothin' to each other, 'ceptin' we was professional partners. But in a way, we were eatin' together, floatin' down together, an' you mout say, tol'ably close together—if we hadn't be'n, her an' my boat tied together, we'd be'n miles apart, cut away by the current. So we jawed two three days, me not graftin' any meat, an' she arguin' there must be some honest way.

Yes, suh! Theh we was broke. I hadn't a cent. She hadn't any money. She went uptown in Mendova, an' come back smilin'. I was dog-gone hungry, an' she'd lost weight, practisin' on an empty stomach. She let her lips smile, when her eyes twinkled to me.

"We get five dollars for a turn into Palura's!" she told me.

Course it was her steppin', about four fifty for that, an' fifty cents for me. I'd never had the nerve to play for the public thataway, but she made me. We done a turn that night on Palura's stage. He was a flat-face feller, who'd killed three four men, an' his place was a show for everybody from N'Orleans to St. Louis.

I felt mighty swell when I sat in the corner, an' she came walkin' down in those white satin knickerbockers she'd put

on special. I was jes' in my old pants, for I hadn't any other, an' a woollen shirt. I played for her to come a walking. Lawse! She'd jes' had them old knickers practising. Now she was like a white rose grown up around a pink rose, for she was white an' pink dressed—and step? Seemed just like she'd practised till now she was right.

Yes, suh! She was like a chimney swift flying, like a tall tree leaning before a strong wind, like the running waves on the flowing riveh—she just danced as natural as anything pretty you all eveh saw in motion, and not one step that wasn't beautiful. She danced fourteen minutes—that's how long it takes to play "Crossing Ripples" the way I do it, an' she faded out on it the way the riveh runs down a crossing into the fog, or night in a fast, bright sunset.

Yes, suh! Those people, up the bankers an' steamboaters, didn't make a sound or motion till long afteh I'd took down my fiddle an' was tightening up the E string. Seemed like the best we had to do wa'n't nothing to them. I felt like it wa'n't no use. I wanted to take May in my arms an' tell her we didn't cyar a whoopin' damn what they thought—they—slam!

Yes, suh! Those quality folks, who was spreein' down to Palura's, come down on the floor with both feet, an' split their gloves or stung their palms. I'd be'n afeared maybe Palura'd welch on that five dollars an' we'd be hongry. Instead of that, when we was back in, he come an' handed May a twenty-dollar note, an' me the same. Forty dollars! I looked at hit. Seemed like it was a mistake—me twenty dollars! Just for fiddlin' that riveh piece.

Then Palura shoves us out on the stage again. I stood there flustered an' ready to cut an' run. May put her arm around my shoulders.

"Dear old boy! Dear old boy!" she exclaimed. "Let's have that 'Flying Swans' piece!"

'Tain't much of a piece. Watching the black geese, an' whooping cranes, an' brent an' Canadian geese flying by away up in the blue sky, their wings flashing in the sunshine, I'd—well, kind of set their motion to music. She always liked that piece. Course, no man can really set birds a-flyin' to music. Not Chopin, or Beethoven, or Wagner—not anybody. But I'd made kind of a pitiful little stagger at it,

which she loved, account of how much she thought of me. You know the way women is—anything somebody they like does is sorta int'restin' to them.

So I played what she said. I couldn't think of nothin' else. So she danced, which took their attention off what I was playing—and watching her, you know, she carried my music right along! I almost forgot I was playing. Yes, suh—she flew down the stage like great white swans fly down the line travelling out of the north, white, strong, shimmering. Lawse! Lawse! Seemed just like those quality folks sportin' in Palura's inspired her to dance. An' I felt an ache in my heart, yes, suh!

You know how a man feels about a beautiful woman. He wants her to know how much he admires her. He wants to put at her feet all that he's got, all that he eveh can be in God's world. He'd put down his bleeding heart, with all its aches, for her to walk on; an' the pain of hit 'd be the greatest joy that he'd eveh known! All that kind of stuff—you know what I mean. An' he knows he cain't he'p her none. He cain't make her no better than he can he'p an oriole to sing, or an American lotus blossom to be lovely. All he can do is jes' wish he mout he'p some. An' then his heart aches, for all he'd like to do—an' afteh all, it's somebody else that can he'p her. Theh those folks was—an' she danced like she'd neveh danced before, for them.

An' afteh hit was all oveh, those quality men came a walkin' up, a bowing in their dress suits, an' the women who'd split their gloves came up, and account of there bein' such a crowd around May they come to me, to talk, and tell me how nice it all was, May's dancing. And I stood there in those old clothes of mine, feelin' like the shanty-boater I was. Yes, suh. I don't s'pose theh's any more miserable feelin' in this world 'an I had, seein' those men around May, an' how she laughed, her cheeks colouring up. Lawse! Lawse! How mighty triflin' a man is, if he ain't much 'count out in the world!

They was one feller there, he come from the op'ry house, an awful swell, dressed right up to the handle. He took May off, by herself, an' she called me in, too. I wondered about that, but seems he wanted her to come up an' dance on his stage, too. Palura he cussed and squabbled around about

it, argying. 'Fore we knowed it we had quite a job, May an' me did, teaming it.

We walked down Ferry Street to our boats, which we'd left with Jim Horseshoe, at the landing. She come on board my boat, to warm, for the night was fresh, walking down. She danced; in the cold it chilled her; I hated to think of her going out into that chilly rag shack over her skiff.

"Yo'll catch cold!" I told her. "All het up, thisaway!"

She looked at me, first into one eye, then into the otheh, with both her eyes. By an' by she laughed a low, funny little chuckle.

"You dear joy!" she said, jes' like that. "Just to please you—I'll take your bed to-night!"

So I went out into her skiff, mighty glad she'd have that comfy cabin to sleep in. In the morning she put her arms around my neck, when I came in, looking at me, smiling, sorry.

"Am I mean, making you sleep out there in the cold?"

That night we played, regular in the theatre. May caught the crowd. They throwed bouquets at her, an' we was called the "River Number," just like that. Her dancing to my music was "wonderful entertainment," they said in the newspapers. In a month we'd saved about six hundred dollars.

I wasn't happy any more. If I'd come off down the rivers, account of my being just a fiddler, and the girl I thought so much of back there shook me for a fellow making twenty dollars a week—she hadn't any voice, she couldn't dance, an' wa'n't nothing but pretty—now I was ready to go back up the bank. The way folks crowded around May, coming back, to see her—and to ask me about her, men an' women!

Oh, I knowed I loved her! One woman come to me, a swell-looking woman, wearing jewels an' clothes all shimmering and perfume. She told me my music was perfectly wonderful—taffy like that. I knowed what she was driving at. It wa'n't no time than she was asking about May.

"Your wife's a wonderful dancer!" she told me. "How your music does inspire her! It is the most inspiring music I ever heard!"

"My wife?" I looked at her. "Why, lady, that girl

wouldn't marry me. I'm jes' a fiddlin' shanty-boater. She's a stepper."

"Not married!" this woman exclaimed. "But—but—oh—yes! I've heard on the river—— I suppose she wouldn't—— How honourable of you to put it that way!"

She sniffed—at May! Course, I hadn't thought anything before. We were jes' two professional people. There wasn't any real violinist May could find, no real musician, so she'd put up with me. Lots of geniuses is thataway, putting up and getting along with what they have, not complaining or anything.

"Who's that woman you were talking to?" May asked me afterward.

"Why, I don't know—one of those uptown women——"

"Oh—was it?"

I knowed right away that May knew I'd blundered, saying something. I hadn't thought anything. Imagine me thinking anything about May! She was awful quiet, along. There was a tall, handsome man come to her, with flowers, saying it, as they tell around. I sure despised that up-the-banker. He wa'n't fitting for May. The bestest man in the world wasn't fit for her. He come to me once. He wanted to know if May wasn't my wife? I told him, the same as I would anybody, how it was. We were only professional people.

Those were mighty lonesome days for me. Seemed just like May an' me was being tore apart, stretching the aching strings of my heart. Course, I jes' knowed hit didn't matter to her. She was thinkin' about her dancing. She was busy having new clothes made and was studying the new life that was opening up to her.

"Lucien!" she told me one day, down on the boat. "Just think—the world wants us!"

"Us!" I laughed, but it hurt. "Hit's you!"

She gave me one of those quick, birdlike looks as though I was plumb ridiculous. I knowed I was, too, or she wouldn't be making fun of me, as if I was much more'n jes' somebody to mark time for her. She could dance to "Patting Juba," making it sound like the "River Voices" when old Joe Parmer plays hit.

I had some jobs fiddling at private houses; ten, twenty,

fifty dollars they'd pay me. They paid May five hundred dollars one night to dance at a business men's dinner, on the table. She came down to the boat crying mad. I don't know what happened. She scolded me, rearing right down on me.

"Don't you know what I want?" she told me. "Don't you see what they think? Oh, you poor idiot—have I *got* to say it?"

"Say what?" I asked; an' then she reared at me. She'd been awful patient with me, one time and another. I couldn't always he'p showin' her what I thought, even if it was insulting for me to love her. I just couldn't bring myse'f to ask her to marry me, account of when you do that to a girl she's always sorry for you, an' she promises to be your sister an' don't know you the next time you meet her.

If I asked her to marry me, course, she'd cut loose, prob'ly go uptown, an' all that'd be left for me would be to trip off down the river, with just her picture on my heart, a picture burned in deep, beautiful, but a scar as big as a Texas brand. I didn't feel like I could ever stand a hurt like that—the hurt of losing her, never seein' May again, not her dancing, nor her eyes brimming with laughter and sympathy—and her lips that smiled free for me, until she begun to dance, and we needn't to wonder if we'd have enough for breakfast the next morning to eat.

That woman I was telling about come down to the ferry in her automobile one day. May'd gone uptown, so she asked Jim Horseshoe to come up the bayou to bring me down. I come down, course, so she took me with her account of May not being there, she said, my music being good, if there wasn't anybody to dance but her.

She was an awful high-toned woman, an' you know she wanted to dance herself, trying the riveh music. So I played for her. Course, if you dance riveh music, you got to know the riveh—know the rocking of the boat in the eddies an' the swing of the current. But this Alice Haven was quite a stepper at that. She said my music just carried her right along. She danced bold, though, not the way May did. Course, she was a good flinger an' had a little kick to her that was graceful—but she didn't have to be professional. She was rich. And when she was tired, she come and laid her

head on my shoulder for a breathing spell. That kind of thing neveh made any man feel bad, course. But the way May acted when this Alice Haven brought me back in her car like a cabin boat!

"She's trying to break up our combination!" May said, talking more spiteful than I ever did get to hear her talk before.

I was s'prised. I'd been worrying my heart out, fearin' May'd see how no 'count I was to her, an' be shut of me like I was an old hat. When she talked thataway, lettin' on she feared we'd break up, my heart jes' grew so big it hurt, like it would burst. May didn't want to lose me! She was so mad at the thought, she lashed me with her tongue, stinging, biting, slighting, scolding words. But, shucks! Theh's no joy so sweet as the raw wounds a woman gives a man, account of her being jealous.

My law! May Gardner slashed and cut me! Don't yo' be'lieve she didn't scorch an' bruise me, an' I was down on my knees at her feet beggin' her mercy an' pity, but my soul rang to sweeter music in the scorn an' fire of her anger than evah hit had echoed before. May Gardner jealous of me! May Gardner tearin' to pieces the good looks an' reputation of that up-the-bank Alice Haven—account of me!

"That woman dancin' to my music!" May scorched me, her face twisting an' her eyes squinting mad. "You fiddlin' for *her* to dance! That woman!"

I expect some men is so sure an' pop'lar that it don't mean nothin' to them when a woman's jealous on their account. Prob'ly up-the-bankers, swell folks, neveh know what hit is to find out a lady likes them so much she hates anybody else that's friendly.

I come down on the riveh account of a woman's laugh at my playing music, the best I could do, for her—when she'd been listening to jingling dollars in another man's pocket. Funny, ain't it, how things work out? I've been making more money in a day 'n that feller she jilted me for has evah made in a week.

I was at May's feet. I kissed those pretty silk stockings, between the straps of her slippers. I cried, tears coming down my cheeks—but not on account of being sorry, no, indeed! I was happy! I was so blamed happy I dassen't

to show her my face, for fear I would betray the joy I was enduring.

An' I took her hands in mine. I kissed them, grateful as a dog for the friendly pat of his mistress. I'd neveh in God's world deserve any happiness that dancing girl had given me; the rewards of heaven couldn't have tempted me away from what it dawned on me was coming to be mine—account of her being jealous of that up-the-bank woman!

Course, d'rectly I was standing up. I was standing in the cabin of my shanty-boat, on the floor where Steppin' May'd been practising. An' she was right theh, with my arms around her, an' her face turned up to me.

"May," I said, "yo' don't mean—yo' don't want me to ask yo' to marry yo', do you?"

"Don't I?" she asked, awful sarcastic. "What do I want, then?"

I couldn't believe it, even then, an' her in my arms, all limp—to have for my own, to kiss those lips, to claim those eyes! Lawse! Lawse! Fiddling Luce come to this down old Mississip'!

Hit wan't jes' professional people. Hit warn't jes' me fiddlin' for her practice steppin', come the time when she'd have somebody that'd be able to play.

Hit were me loving that lovely woman, with her arms around my neck, and my lips worshipping temple lips, looking into the gem-light windows of her soul. Yes, suh! How come hit that woman let on she loved me? How could she—that woman, like a statue alive?

I married her. We cut loose from Mendova, trippin' down. When night come, I couldn't believe hit were so, that she wouldn't, an' I wouldn't either, go out into that skiff alongside, to sleep under the tarpaulin—but this was our cabin, our room, and she'd sit on my lap. Sho! Sho!

Yes, suh! Lots drap down old Mississip', an' the farther down they go, the more miserable they are. They'd better quit, 'fore they roll out at the Passes. But some—some that hear the music, some that see the flash and spread of the colours, some that listen to the birds and feel the soothing in the sting of the north wind, an' smell the fragrance of the blossoms in the dank of the swamp brakes—they'd sure better keep on trippin' down; yes, indeedy!

I tell yo', if a man can keep step to the song old Mississipp' sings, he better not break with it. He'll march into the halls of plumb comfort, if he marks the time, yes, suh. That's my experience. 'Tain't everybody's, but hit's mine. An' May, she says it's her experience, too. We've been far together, New York an' the Coast—— Sho! No matter if we's busy—ev'ry wunst in a while we stop off on old Mississip', buy a shanty-boat an' trip down. That's what we're doing now. But we don't neveh stop to Mendova any more. May won't let me.

"I ain't going to have that woman—any other woman—steppin' to your music!"

Just like that, and then we both laugh.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN— AMERICANS?

BY WILBUR DANIEL STEELE

From Pictorial Review

THEY live in the country of the old—old houses, old sands, old men. Already they dream, and this is their dream, that when they are gone the tides, which seem to eat deeper into the Cove each year, will just come on up one spring and carry what's left of Cape Cod down under the water of the Seven Seas that in its old youth it conquered, its work and its glory done. And that will be before long now, for there are only a few folks left.

You can count the families on one hand. There are the Whites and the Fullers in the Hollow, the Rogerses at the Bog, the Brewster brothers at the Cove. That's about all now in this tenuous, half-drowned, seven-mile wrist of the Cape. Of the Whites and Rogerses there are four generations, in the Fuller house three: the latter ends run pretty puttering, though, and pretty thin.

If it's a far cry from the Edward Fuller who came ashore to say his prayers, chase Indians, and leave his name on the Pilgrim Tablet over in Provincetown, down to Eddie Fuller, yawning and attending to his pimples behind the post-office boxes at the Center—if it's a far cry from those dreadless "subjects of the dread sovereign" down to the youthless White youths, flivver-rattling to their fevered merrymakings at Wellfleet or Eastham, their galvanic dead-frog dancing, their drug-store tipple, and their radio jazz—if there's a gap there, there's a gap almost as wide and quite as melancholy between these tag-ends of the stock and a generation still living under the roofs with them—Sam White and Benjie Fuller in the Hollow, Ember Rogers at the Bog, Andy and

Isaiah Brewster at the Cove—men who fetched Kennebec ice-cakes to Calcutta and brought new China tea up the Thames in the *Sea Glory* and the *A. J. Stowell* two weeks ahead of London's own East-Indiamen in the days that were days.

In those days the Cape bred women, too. Look at Molly, Andy Brewster's wife, that's dead and gone. Then look at the Molly Brewster of to-day. She keeps house for her great-grandfather Andy and his brother Isaiah at the Cove, and what house she keeps! Well, it's not the way the other Molly did it sixty years ago. Bread baked in Boston, beans baked in Chicago, cake in cardboard from goodness-knows-where! She hasn't the time, she says.

Hasn't the time! Those two old men fathom the sad, deep, literal truth of that. She hasn't the time. She came too late, the sands too nearly run. After her the deluge; so why take pains? What's the use of forethought, with nothing to come? What's the use of character, never to be handed down? What's the use even of appearances? Studying her secretly from beneath their watery lids, they comprehend. That is why, then, she speaks a language of strange, daring, slipshod words; why her gestures are all immoderate and her songs out of tune; why she goes about unabashed in skirts as short and lips as red as a California harlot in the days of gold. That is why she is never at home evenings, darning or quilting under the sitting-room lamp, but off as soon as ever the supper dishes are stacked, with a pat and a fling and a mouth of rebellion, flitting the devil alone knows where in the dark of the country of the old.

"Let us eat, drink, and be merry——" Poor girl!

She hasn't the time even to care about the company she keeps. This strikes deepest into the hearts of Andy and Isaiah. Their pride is bitter. To think of these two blond vikings of the republic who carried the Stars and Stripes around a wondering world, who came home to fetch good, honest Indies rum ashore under the dark of the Cove like the free men they were, and went up to the meeting-house in their Sabbath beavers to worship the God of Massachusetts as only free men may—to think of them having to sit, shackled to their rockers by the weight of their proud years,

and watch the remnant of their line and population going, without visibly caring, to the dogs!

They would have called him a dog in their time, or at least "one of them niggers of some sort."

He comes out of the deepening shadows. Whence he comes, in that narrow land where there are only the Rogerses and Brewsters, the Fullers and the Whites, who can say? Andy and Isaiah can't. When they try, their minds close up.

Their minds do that of late years. More and more easily. When, at the ice-cream feast of the Dorcases last autumn, the two old fellows undertook in mournful gaiety to twit the schoolma'am upon the dwindling of her flock, and when she looked puzzled (for all the world) and told them that, land alive! they weren't to worry, she had her hands full, and would have them a sight fuller, she guessed, before they got around to putting in the new primary room—when she said that, Isaiah looked at Andy and Andy at Isaiah, one winked and the other cackled, and their minds, like wary clam-shells, closed up tight. "Primary room!" They weren't to be taken in by jokes like that. They were too smart.

He comes out of the deepening shadows, his approach heralded, long before he is seen, by the sounding-boards of the hills that gather down to the Cove, the clank of a loose brake-beam, the whine of gritted springs, gaskets wheezing. A curious centaur, head and shoulders and busy arms of a man, body of an ungroomed half-ton truck; so from their rockers on the porch behind the mosquito-netting they always see him, Jimmy the Greek. So he careens to a halt under the antique, uneasy willows in the blue-brown shadow cast by Sheep Hill; so he snorts, backs, swerves, carricoles, pawing the sand, gambolling in the twilight of these Yankee gods; so he rears there, breathing heavily with his pitted cylinders, peering glassily with his one large rectangular eye at the house beyond the turf, the house native and noble, solid and broad and low, with a roof like another slope of the gray Pamet moors. So, unbudging from his hybrid shell, he calls through the dusk: "Molly to home?"

Neither Andy nor Isaiah answers. Rock, rock, rock, their chairs and their dry bones creaking, their eyes meeting, full of repugnance, rebellion, appeal. They'd have their tongues cut out before they'd speak.

No need. Molly has answered herself. "Yep, just a second I'll be with yu, Jim, old kid."

She passes out between the rockers, hatless, free of elbow, wanton of stocking, neither mother of to-morrow nor daughter of yesterday.

"Where you bound for, Molly?" Andy writhes. He feels degraded.

"Where you bound?" Isaiah writhes. He, too, had sworn never to ask again.

"Oh, nowheres. Up to the dance at Chatham, that's all. Oh, for the love, Jimmy, can that honking, will yu! I'm on my way! Now, Daddies, run, climb in your beds like good boys. Sound sleep, sweet dreams!"

Sleep! Dreams! The mockery!

Their rockers are still. Leaning forward, squeezing the chair-arms with their vein-corded fists, they follow the iron flight of the centaur, cast back in fainter and fainter reverberations from the folded moor-sides, careening farther away, deeper away in the mists of the falling night.

He's going up Graveyard Hill now. If only their legs could run as swiftly as their minds. He's abreast of the old Snow place now. Thrrrrmmm! Whine and wheeze! An abominable whisper threading the valleys. It's louder for an instant, as though a door in the hills had opened. He's crossing the marsh at the Centre now, this what-is-he? This Greek. This what's-his-name? J. Krenk, General Trucking. Jimmy the Greek. And Molly Brewster!

Anger, reckless and helpless, sweeps them.

Let him take her. Let him take her back to his lemon-peddling, olive-stinking, two-for-a-nickel Levant ports. Then let her see!

Then let her think of those White women, the other Mollys, her mothers!

Memories submerge the two men; their tantrum passes and gives place to nostalgia; they turn cowards, feeling themselves abandoned, defeated at last. The mosquito-bar is a cage, oppressing their lungs and bringing to their skins a faint, chill sweat. Moved by a common impulse, they get up and rush out. They have forgotten their hats, and Isaiah's head is as bald as a porpoise. What matter? Their rheumatics! Their hearts! What odds!

Where are they going, hoisting their feet so industriously along the clam-shell metal of this road? Where and why?

"We might drop around and see Sam White a minute, the night's so fine."

"So we might. I hear tell he was ailin' a trifle yesterday."

Two shafts of light, streaming from nowhere, wheel across the dark. Two orbs, sudden and blinding, fetch up with a snort to eye the vivid old men.

"Here they are now," comes a voice out of the creature.

"Why," gasps Andy, "if 'tain't the White boys!" Isaiah, blinking into the headlights, lifts a reedy voice: "We was bound your way, boys."

"Well, Ma said we should stop by and tell you, and save you the trip. It'll be Friday at two, the fun'ral."

The monster squats there on its rubber haunches, purring, reading their stupid faces. After a little it says: "You'd heard about Gran'pa, hadn't you? Went last evenin', quiet, no pain. And it's Friday at two." Presently it gives them over for dumb ones, bounces around in the road and streams off up the vale, leaving their eyes full of stars.

"Sam!" says one.

"Sam!" says the other. That's all.

Perhaps it's the way it happened, the stage-effects; perhaps it's something long predestined in the calendar of their years. No matter, the night has turned a corner and become apocalyptic.

Sam White is gone.

In silence they plod back. They plod back toward the cage of the netting, the eighty-year prison of the dark house. Sleep. Dreams.

But, no-sir! Not by a dang sight, they won't. They bolt the road and flee it at right angles across the tricky footing of the poverty-grass.

"*They seek water, and die in the open.*" That's rats.

But why all this? They knew Sam had to go sooner or later and give over his much of room to the returning wilderness and the climbing tides. Just as they know that Benjie and Ember will have to give over theirs, and they themselves, and let the tired Cape go down. Didn't they know that?

They're silly, but you can't argue it. It's something in this night, something let loose, something that pursues and

climbs up their legs like a travesty of strength, another childhood. So they clamber for all they're worth, in silence, their mouths open, as if it were true that the valley behind was filling up with the flood.

They look back when they reach the crest of Sheep Hill, and from the height they see the country familiar to them, rod by rod of its folded moors, its dunes and winding marshes, spread of a sudden fantastic and pixy-peopled under this night. Will-o'-the-wisps and ghost-fires.

There's John Champion's house, under the shoulder of Finback, a mile to the east. John died a good twenty years ago, and his daughter's family moved to Iowa. Yet there looks to be a light in it, a goblin cheer. Dave Burch passed on in the 'nineties; his children live in Los Angeles; the homestead, hidden under the cottonwoods in the Flat, opens an eye in distant banshee mockery. And there again. As if there were people, populations! And there again. Like a lamp on Borneo Plain!

There's one element that never betrays, but always plays fair. If the land is playing tricks with your eyes, old fellows, turn them to the sea.

Across the water the sky toward Boston shows a late loom of dusk, doubled upside down in the mirroring plain. Not far offshore, across the mouth of the Cove, a fisherman sails, his dim masts erect in the meagre breeze. Farther distant, toward the lights on Provincetown shore, a monster lies at rest on the sea.

So the sea, too, is corruptible to-night, even the sea. It abides Leviathan. Leviathan blowing a leaden, lazy spout; prodigious creature, ink-black, and incandescent-striped.

"She come in weeth engine-trouble," says a voice.

There's another watcher on Sheep Hill. He arises from a beach-plum bush at their feet, headless, because he has his coat shawlwise over his head.

"I never seen her beefore, thees ship, and that's funny because my boy goes een her, and she's lak a city, he says. Fifty-nine t'ousand ton! What you know about that?"

What, indeed, do they know about that? Except that the night is trying to play them another trick. Painting that shadow on the shadows out there, enormous; as though a master and a mate of an incomparable *Sea Glory* were to

be taken in by a jest as thin as that, a ship enormous as eighty *Sea Glories* on one keel!

"I tell you," says the shade, "these Englishmann, these Germann, they got nootheng on us now. One day us Americans we weel be as beeg a shipping nation as they is on the sea; you watch."

It's too rare. Andy and Isaiah open their mouths to chuckle, and before they can chuckle, a hot, contemptuous anger has got in their throats instead.

"Who are *you*?" they cry, and "Where you from?" Those voices that rang, full-winded, absolute, over the decks of the white clippers of the years when the world rubbed its eyes. Echoes now.

Echoes, yes, but echoes still puissant. The headless Jack-in-the-box sounds fetched-aback and ill at ease.

"Wh-wh-who am I? Well, I guess you know me, Meester Brewster. You know Manuel Braganza. You seen me round plentee, I guess. Since five year I got thees old Champion place back here, crost from Jimmee the Greek. I guess you know *me*, all right."

"Nope."

"You don't know Manuel Brag—— Don't know Manny the Lisbon?"

"Never hear the name. Never!"

"You—you—never hear o' my boy Johnnee?"

"Johnnie who?"

Silence. That has done for him. It has done for them, too; done wonders. Their feet are solid on their own hill again and they begin to tower. Men against bogies, men will win every time.

It's true. The spook hasn't a word. Presently he begins to fade before their eyes, a receding whisper of sand. Across the hilltop and down the slope the long, black, dismembered torso vanishes degree by degree into the dark above the invisible Cove.

Give these old fellows an inch and they'll take a mile. The impulse to pursue, to rout him seven-fold, to crow, to pile it on, is too strong. Nor is it altogether this that hauls them to the sandy precipice where he disappeared. Triumph has given sudden rein to memories; their feet are in old paths, their tongues wag.

"Remember that night the revenue-man come snoopin'?"

"Remember the skiff bottom-up on the beach with the three bar'ls of rum under it, and me under it with 'em and my legs caught out by the gun'l; full in view?"

"Rec'lect the brig hove to out there, 'bout where that fisherman lays now?"

"The *Abraham*, wa'n't it? And Ezra Small?"

They pause. Pause? Where are they? What in the name of Jehoshaphat are they doing here, old flies, clinging midway of the precipitous sand? This much is certain: if they don't catch their death one way they'll catch it another.

They pause. Hunkering down in little sand-slides, they gaze at the becalmed schooner. In the cobweb starlight it might truly be the *Abraham*, and Captain Ezra prowling the deck and chewing his whisker and wondering what's wrong with the Brewster boys ashore. They gaze at the pool of the inlet below them, and there the starlight, chasing the ripples, weaves silver stuff of dreams, mesmeric, fluent. The gods are young.

"Rec'lect that night, eh?"

"Remember Molly——"

Molly! A subconscious discord. A rift of syncopation, dilute, galvanic; a painted mouth, an empty head; a half-ton truck, a Greek.

No, though! By thunder, no! *Molly*, they're talking of. *Molly!*

She was the wife of one, the sister-in-law of the other. Years have almost outlawed that inequality. To each she comes back all comeliness, all docile bravery, all grace. A woman of those days.

"Remember Molly that night, Isaiah? You couldn't see her, though, and you stuck under the skiff; the way she come trippin' down from nowheres, fetch one look at your boots croppin' out like a hamstrung turtle, set down on the skiff, tidied her skirts out over, and set there gazing at the stars as soberlike as if she was in the habit of star-gazin' every night with a shotgun laid across her lap. Nor you couldn't see the way old Revenue Perkins eyed her and hesitated, scrawn out his neck and fetch to a halt."

"I heard him, though, Andy; promise you that. 'Pleasant evenin', Mis' Brewster!' 'Pleasant evenin', Mr. Perkins!'

'I'm aimin' to have a look innunder that skiff, if you don't mind, Mis' Brewster?' 'In which case, Mr. Perkins, you're aimin' to do something you ain't able; not so long's I'm settin' onto it.' 'In which case, Mis' Brewster, I shall have the law onto the lot of you——' 'In which case, Mr. Perkins, I'll have something a sight quicker actin' than the law onto *you*, sir.' (With that I hear the gun-butt easin' up along the garboard-strake.) 'Quit it, Molly Brewster!' says Perkins. 'Git, Eben Perkins,' says Molly, 'and git quick!'"

"And Revenue gat! I *guess* he gat!"

"Never hear the last of it, did he? Nor come snoopin' *this* way again, eh?"

"Feared o' meetin' up with Molly! Heh-heh!"

The gentlest, the abidingest of women! What homage could be more precious to the heroine of long ago than this cachination of old men, this mirth flung out in thready challenge to reconquering nothingness and the prowling powers of the dark?

The dark answers, coagulating in another shade at their feet, down-hill.

"What you doin' here, you guys?"

Their mouths dry and fall agape.

"Well, I v-v-vow!" bleats Isaiah, and Andy echoes him: "I vow!"

"Oh," breathes the shade, "I know now. It's old Isaiah and old Andy."

"But who in—in —— are *you*?"

"Don't you rec'nize me? It's Tony Fuller from the Coast Guard. You know me."

"*Tony!*" They see their chance. "*Tony Fuller!*" The impostor is delivered into their hands. Their voices break high. "There wa'n't never a man—there's been Eds and Ezras, Johns and Jonathans—but never a man amongst the Fullers called by any such nigger name, such a lemon-peddlin' name, as '*Tony*.' No-sir-ee!"

The haunt chuckles, rubbing his lips with a spectral sleeve.

"Try Farquiera then; that's my family's name when they come from the Azores. Or if you're bent on crackin' your jaws, try 'em on this guy Sob-lef-sky—Sub-lof-sky—whatever 'tis. He's down in the road there to the left, waitin'; so you get along now, quiet, and tell him I sent you, and he'll

leave you through. Skedaddle, my boys; clear out o' here!"

If there is one there are a dozen retorts, just at their scandalized lips; arrogant laughter, withering old quarter-deck oaths. Dumbly, though sending down a whispering lace of sand, like autumnal spiders, they flee as they are told, not knowing why. They get off the cliff, their own cliff, not knowing how; a lichenous ground is underfoot, then a streak half clay, then ruts. A wind, a slow draft redolent of clam and weed, bears them along; an air familiar as the years of their youth, turned secret and queer. It bears them into the mouth of a hollow floored with blackness and roofed with stars. Sergeant Belkar Soblievski of the State Police snaps on the headlight of his motor-cycle and examines them with his yellow cornucopia of flame.

"You're out late, my friends." Then, not meaning the light-blistered couple to stand there all night, he says in a kindlier tone: "Go right on, the way you were going, my fathers, and keep your mouths shut, and no harm done. Good-night."

It is some moments before he snaps off the snooping light. Behind Isaiah and Andy, across the wheel-track to the Eden of their ancestral Cove, the ray hangs horizontal, like a lazy angel's flaming sword.

Here come the willows out of the hill. There's a moon somewhere under the eastern ocean, and its foreglow, refracting from the zenith, describes with faint silver the slopes of the roof, the two fat chimneys, the fence.

So it's home they're coming, after all.

Their boots drag; soul and body they're beat, the pair of them, dead beat.

The house opens and swallows them. No need of a lamp; they can find their beds in the dark. Mind the table, Isaiah. Take care of that swayed door; it's got to be fixed, no two ways. Here's the chair for Andy, and here's the chair for Isaiah, to drape their coats and trousers over, their shirts and drawers.

There's nothing left but sleep, then. Sound sleep. Sweet dreams.

Isaiah, the youngster of the two, lies on his back, toes up, wide awake. Andy, across the room, lies toes up, too, count-

ing sheep. One sheep over the fence; two sheep over the fence; three sheep over the fence. There's a nigger-looking fellow herding them. Land! he's got no head. Manny the Lisbon! That's a dirty port, Lisbon. And he had the gall to say—this headless Portugee Eyetalian fly-by-night—

What's that? There! Again! Passing like spirit foot-falls across the turf outside!

The hall clock is still—still these years—but Molly's alarm-clock sends in a tinny cheeping from the kitchen. Where can Molly be?

Five sheep over the fence; six sheep over the—

What's that? "Andy!"

"Yes, Isaiah?"

Isaiah slides out of bed, tiptoes across the chamber, creeps in beside his elder brother. Neither of them says anything. It's nearly seventy years since Isaiah did that. But neither of them speaks.

They're not used to lying awake. It's this night. This night of supernal license, weird air-quakes, invasions crepuscular and fleering of little peoples from beyond the pale.

Seven sheep over the fence—

"What's wrong, boy?"

"I hear a mosquito in the room, dang him, and I can't sleep."

"Pshaw, Isaiah, now you turn over and shut your eyes and——" Andy sits bolt up, a listener. "Hark!"

Thud! A fault in the atmosphere, small, echoless. A gunshot, unmistakable. Thud! Thud! Thud! An imponderable fusillade.

Is it ghosts, in this land of the dead? Memories? All inside the brain?

Andy tries Isaiah: "Isaiah, did you hear anything?"

The youngster lies there with the quilt tight over his chest. It's a terrible thing, when you've been equal to anything and everything, to find yourself suddenly like this. His voice comes as thin as eel-grass.

"Where's that girl?"

It's too much for Andy, and he joins in: "Why don't she ever come home? What's she thinkin' on, this hour of the night?"

"'Tain't decent, Andy. What'll folks say?"

"What does she care for that?"

"What does she care if she keeps us wakin' for her?"

"Who are *we*, anyhow? What do *we* 'mount to?"

"What does anything 'mount to these days; anything but cavortin' about with foreigners, dancin', huggin' maybe, carryin' on, forgettin' your religion, your elders, your up-bringin'—anything to make the time go quick?"

"And devil take the hindmost!"

There's a cry, chambered in distance. The devil taking the hindmost, perhaps. The empty moors and dunes where men used to live give it out; one lone articulation, anger, terror, mortal pain, who can tell from the spent whisper creeping in through the Brewster blinds?

"A-n-d-y, I wish—I wish that girl was to home."

"I—I wish she was."

The shame of it, confessed at last, mutually, out loud! Isaiah Brewster, who in the name of the Great Republic stood up on his feet and told the port-bashaw of the Emperor of Siam to go to Jericho! Andy Brewster, who with his own hands put half his crew in irons at the height of the Seventy-one Typhoon! The two of them now, praying nothing but the sound of Molly's dance-shoes on the floor beyond the wall; the comfort of even Molly's doomsday youthfulness under the roof with them!

Prayers aren't half-ton trucks, though, for beggars to ride.

Or are they? Wait!

Isaiah is up now, sitting as bolt and gray as Andy.

Another mosquito? No. Hardly louder than a mosquito, to be sure, and oddly like the insect's silky whine—that whine of springs and beams and gaskets, all in one, a mile away.

"'Tis him!"

"'Tis! 'Tis!"

"He's to the marsh now—or—or no——"

"N-n-no—no—— Isaiah!"

"You mean it don't sound like 'twas on——"

"'Tain't on. 'Tain't on any road I know of, Isaiah. That's clear to the north'rd somewheres. Sounds to me——"

"Sounds to me like it was all adrift somewheres up Borneo Plain——"

Thud! The shadow of the phantom of a shot! That's gone.

So is the whine, like the whirl of a night-hawk planing back into the night again.

"Isaiah," says Andy, "you lay down and go to sleep. This is foolishness."

Five minutes, up they knife again.

A step. A clandestine sole on the porch. A sneaking tread.

Andy wouldn't speak for a million dollars; neither would Isaiah.

"Molly!" they call in the same breath.

No answer. Only the scratch of a match, out the kitchen way.

"Molly Brewster!"

The match goes out. More footfalls. Odd footfalls. Odd chills.

Who? What?

The second match is at the very foot of their bed, a blinding nimbus. In the nimbus there are two eyes, a lean, green-brown face, a hat like an inverted flower-pot made of kinky wool.

"You gaht ahny rags, say?"

When Isaiah was mate in the Boston fruit-bark *Hope Wade* he used once a year to load figs at Smyrna. He used to sit in an armchair on the house within one spit of the rail and keep those natives going as only a Cape man could, with alternate volleys of truculence and wit. "If there's one thing I'd love to see before I die," he used to say, "it's one of you lazy heathen Turk-fellahs tryin' to earn a meal in the town of Pamet, Barnstable County, Mass. If there's one thing I'd love!"

It comes back to Isaiah, every fatal syllable. The white rims widen around his eyes. He begins to speak.

"You're that Turk——"

"Curse the Toork! He keeled my fahther, my mahther, my brahther!"

"No-sir, though, no-sir, all foolin', you're the one—the one folks c-calls the Turk—that comes by sellin' carpets. You are so!"

A frown withers the green-brown face.

"You gaht ahny rags, say? You gaht ahny rags?"

The match burns a finger and sails away in two red stars.

blown by an Asian oath. In reverse the business of footfalls reenacted, across the kitchen, across the porch.

The night has overreached itself. "Got any rags?" That's a joke.

There a glimmer of moon through the cracks in the blinds. In the wraith of light Andy lifts on an elbow and studies supine Isaiah. The youngster lies with his head cracked back, as though by a blow, his mouth open, the shape of a black egg, and his whisker thrust straight up in the air. He's not dead, though; he's asleep.

Andy lies back and summons all his resolution. Resolutely he envisions sheep, just such sheep as Dave Burch used to run on Borneo Plain, matted gray-brown bodies and slender legs snapping under them. Over the stone wall they go. One sheep over two sheep over; three sheep over; four—or was it five?—~~five~~—six sheep——

When he awakens it is with a gulp and a kick.

Who's that? By the bed there, towering in the new gray? It's Isaiah. It's the youngster, getting his pants on.

"I can't stand it," says Isaiah, his teeth aclatter.

"What is it *now*?"

"I don't know. My godfrey, if I *knowed*, I—there! Hark to that!"

"That trompin' like?"

"Trompin', yes. Trompin', skitterin', skutterin' all about, whisperin', too, and groanin' into the bargain. There, now! Will y' hark?"

"In the wood-house. Or more like Molly's room. Mebby it's Molly."

"I want to know."

"Or cats."

"I want to know."

Andy fumbles his pale legs out of the quilt and into his trousers. They go in stocking-feet, carrying their boots. In the kitchen Andy pauses.

"Molly come home?"

"Never hear her."

"You been asleep, though."

"I ain't. Not one blessed wink, and that's true. No-sir, everything I seen, I seen. There's niggers and heathen and all manner of islanders and dagoes spiritin' about this night.

Andy, there was a Turk come into our room, and I seen him with my own two eyes. So I ain't been asleep."

"I'll look in her room, anyway, on the chance."

Holding his breath, he edges open Molly's door. His head disappears. It reappears, the cheeks collapsing with relief.

"By glory, she *be*. Here all this time, to bed, asleep. Us fools!"

Side by side, holding the door open, they gaze into the chamber, cave-lit with the seepage of dawn, perfumed with violet water, tar soap, carnation powder, fibre-silk stockings, and all the faint, mingled emanations from frocks and underthings—the rectangular gray whiteness of the bed—the dark spot of a head averted on the pillow.

"Don't wake 'er."

"No; easy's the word; take care."

The old fools!

"Molly!" breathes Andy, just once. Just to try.

The head on the pillow flops over. The heads in the door thrust out.

Black eyes study them from the pillow, hypnotized.

Jimmy the Greek!

If he is hypnotized, what are they?

It was in this room, in that bed, that Molly White Brewster died, on Cleveland's election day. It was through that window her soul went to heaven.

They can do nothing but stare; stare at the bureau, holy of holies, untidy, intimate; a pot of cold-cream, a ribbon, a note, a garter, a kitten of combings, a man's plaid cap; stare at the bed, the pillow, the solitary presence there, obscurely begotten, horde-born, Mediterranean.

They open their mouths to roar like lions; in the hush they bleat.

"Where's M-M-Molly?"

He holds them with black-and-white eyes; he has lost his tongue.

"Wh-wh-wh-where's *Molly*?"

It's Molly that answers, Molly's feet askip on the porch behind them, the wind of her coming across the kitchen, the fling of her arms brushing them aside like wraiths.

Worse than wraiths! Of a sudden something beyond accounting happens. In Molly's bedroom they've always kept

the old paper, spotty and faded as it is; funny old paper. peopled by Venetian boatmen and early Victorian trees. And now between two breaths Andy and Isaiah are pictures with the boatmen and memories with the trees. It is as though, still visible, no one saw them; as though reality had abandoned them and gone out into the middle of the room.

Molly is real; they're not. Tag-end of a race and a tradition, her docked hair tousled, her shoes streaked with mud from another county, hem of a torn petticoat at the trail, she's flesh alive; a tradition and a race beginning.

She's on the bed's edge, hip and elbow, one wild hand in Jimmy Krenk's black curls, combwise, questioning, and her breath against his cheek.

"Y'all right, kid? Tell me quicker'n quick: y'all right?"

"Are *you* all right, Moll; you tell *me*?"

"You should worry about me! D'I look sick?"

"But, Moll——"

"Shush, kid, I know. I look like a home-made hang-over. I know I do, but you got to consider a hundred 'n' thirty miles in that bus of yours is no tea-dansant for a fair young thing, is it now? 'Specially the last fifteen of 'em on a rim. Cheer up; I'll look good when I get a shot of coffee in me. And don't worry about the stuff; I got it all safe and dark to you-know-who, you-know-where, thirty-one cases, check, and you couldn't have made it snappier yourself, you poor angel, and that's that. And the bus is back in Costa's g'rage with the old plates on—and the clutch afloat—and that phony rear shoe gone to —— and that's that. And that motor-cycle egg was into Yarmouth Hospital at three, I just got word at the marsh, with his right arm out of commish. And that's that."

"Was it you, Moll? Was it you plugged the guy, same's Turkey says?"

"Well, if I didn't, there's been some awful mistake. I picked up your gun when you dropped it, and I was peeved. But say, don't get me talkin'——"

"Listen, Moll, tell me somethin'. Was it you carried me up here from the Cove, same's Turkey says?"

"Well, Turkey helped some—as quick as he——"

"Where was the other guys?"

"Busy, don't you forget. Who'd you s'pose got the cop

crowd trailed off down Truro way? Jazzy work for a while. But now, Jim, how's the bean?"

"Bean's bright."

It's the strangest sensation, being a Venetian boatman inked on moldy wall-paper, harkening to unintelligible tongues.

"And the leg?"

"Absitively perfect limb."

"Turkey get it bandaged right? That petticoat of mine I slammed on——"

"Coould not find ahny rahgs."

Reality spreads with the growing dawn. It's the Armenian himself, down on his hams on the carpet beyond the bed.

"No rags? Turkey, you're a bird! But listen—my——! You mean to say that plugged leg is still—— Oh, you poor lamb! Now, listen, Jim; I'll go as easy as easy, but I got to give it a look."

The painted boatmen close their painted eyes. Their painted ears they can not close. Earth swarms. Their painted minds they can not get quite shut. Murmurs. Fragments. The land of the old, the turncoat, teems with the pitiless voices of the young. Rumours creep in through the windows.

"Doc and the priest ought to be coming——"

"——No, Gabriel phoned the priest he needn't come. Jim's all right."

"He'll be all right, that is, if we can keep him doggo for a spell——"

"——But what they'll say up-Cape when he don't show up at short-stop for the Legion in the Barnstable game next Sunday——"

"Oh, we can bull through it somehow—— Hey, what's that?"

Another kind of a murmur; a high, faint throbbing in the air.

"Molly! Inside there! Here comes Doc Bader from Provincetown. I guess it's him, anyway; it sounds like Gaspa's sea-plane. I'll slide up to the pond and show him the way."

Still another note, within the room, this one, half crooning:

"Good kid, did I hurt? Oh, good kid, I tried to be so gentle——"

"Gentle, Moll? Don't talk. You're the gentlest ever; and you're more'n the gentlest; you're the beautifulest, and you're more'n the beautifulest; you're the straightest, bravest——"

"Bravest! Quit kiddin', you Greek idiot. I been frightened sober; I'm still scared weak. Take hold of me and hang onto me tight, tight."

"I got yu, tight. All there is, though, I hate to be a bother here."

"Bother! That's a good line. It's my house, isn't it, Jimmy dearie? And seeing we're going to get married Friday, where's the diff?"

(Friday at two!)

The Venetian boatmen end their fading by fading quite away, out of the bedroom, out of the house.

It's a fog-dawn, the light from the sun-tipped hills coming down at every angle through the pearly smother. It's as if the night, in place of ending, had just bleached out. Albino darkness. White shades. The veil is troubled by them, half-glimpsed and gone; white shades of youth, black-eyed and swarthy, sallow and gray-eyed.

Once more Andy and Isaiah flee the canopy of the willows and puff up Sheep Hill. The mist dilutes; at the height they find the sun and air. And the sea, Leviathan gone. The honest sea.

They flop on a timber and gaze at it. By and by Isaiah points a finger at the wedge of the Cove, still in shadow below them.

"By cricky, she goes fast these days, Andy." He is resolved to see it, and he sees it; the marsh growing an estuary, the estuary a strait, a worm of blue salt water eating ever and ever more hungrily into the entrails of the dead Cape. "By cricky, 'twon't be many years till you can sail a vessel straight through the Hollow to the back side."

"Where do you get that stuff?" inquires a voice from behind the brothers. They won't have it. They won't hear.

"'Twa'n't so many years ago," says Andy in resolute musing, "there was beach-plums growin' out there where them breakers are now."

"The —— there was!" A shadow falls across them, and out over their heads, blue and amber, floats the cloud of a cigarette. It's Frankie Silvado, the surfman from Pamet Station, and he has a purple moustache and dark, live, ardent eyes. He might have yellow eyes and green whiskers for all Andy and Isaiah: they won't see him and they don't see him.

Andy clears an indomitable throat: "Accordin' to my calc'lations, Isaiah, the way she's sinkin' now——"

"That's a lovely pipe, that is," persists the tactless shade. "I been patrollin' this shore ten years and more, and I used to have to walk on the cliff because the tide was all over where them grass-flats is now. You old geezers ain't up with the times, or you'd know all this land is makin' all the while. There was a professor lectured to Provincetown last summer, and he says, like's not, it'll be all dry ground from here clean to Plymouth shore one day, with woods, like's not, and farms, and cities——"

Cities! The brothers are betrayed. From one to the other passes a sage and soundless guffaw.

"Though," adds Silvado, "I don't know what kind o' people there'll be to live in 'em, the way things are goin' now with this Cape crowd, gettin' to be smugglers—runnin' in liquor off these West Indie vessels for all they're worth—women as bad as the men, too, accordin' to what Tony Fuller says he seen last night. I tell you the truth, I don't know what this country of ourn is comin' to."

By and by Andy turns an eye on Isaiah, and once more, with dogmatic patience, clears his throat.

"As I was sayin'—the way she's sinkin' now—and the way they're droppin' off—Sam yesterday—like's not you or me to-morrow—'twon't be so long now before there won't be any left hereabouts."

"Any what?"

Curse and double curse that Ginny! Like drops of water on the skull it grows suddenly too much.

"Any folks!" cried Isaiah.

"Any folks?"

Now they upend on their reedy legs and face him and lash out at him.

"Any—any—*Americans!*"

In the white pouring of the sunshine, as they watch greed-

ily the effect of that brutal blow, the red mottles go out of their cheeks. Now, at last, they are terrified. This fellow doesn't even know what they're driving at.

"What do you mean?" he puzzles. "What do you mean—*Americans*?"

ONE USES THE HANDKER-CHIEF

By ELINORE COWAN STONE

From Woman's Home Companion

A PASSIONATE sneeze rent the studious calm of the Third Grade room. Before its echoes had died away, the Third Grade, Mexican, as one man, had focused a shocked, incredulous gaze upon the author of the disturbance—a pale, shrinking boy with eager eyes peering nearsightedly from beneath an unkempt shock of dull black hair.

"Ticher," shrilled several scandalized voices, as the startled Miss Lipscomb looked up, "Ticher, eet iss that Raphael who sneezes—that Raphael Arcienega."

"Right into the air he sneezes, Ticher," vociferated Anita Perez, indignantly, "that air that we mus' breathe—*nosotros*."

"And sooch wet sneezes," objected Emilia Villa.

"He doss not even cover weeth the hand the face," cut in Concha Florida. "I think he iss verree bad boys. Now shall we all mebbie be seek."

"*Quien sabe?* Perhaps even we shall die," supplemented Hortensia Valdes, her voice rising in a hysterical quaver.

It was as if the Third Grade already felt itself in the throes of a deadly epidemic. Anita Perez shivered and sneezed virtuously into a dainty lace-edged fragment of muslin. Since handkerchiefs had become *à la moda* in the Third Grade, Anita's had always been of the daintiest and, naturally, the most often on display. Manuelo Habanera and Pedro Gonzalos hastily drew from their pockets generous squares of cotton of dubious cleanliness, into which they coughed sepulchrally and long, turning reproachful eyes upon the author of the contaminating sneeze.

With head deprecatingly on one side the object of this general disapproval peered dubiously about the room. What was it all about? He had but sneezed, as everyone must do in the course of nature. Why, then, this public inquisition? Appealingly he looked at the kind lady at the desk.

"Children, stop it!" commanded Miss Lipscomb, briskly. "Raphael has just started to school. Perhaps no one has ever told him that one uses the handkerchief when he coughs or sneezes. I am sure that if we explain kindly to him why it is necessary to do so, he will try to remember after this. Who would like to tell him about it?"

"Ramon, Ticher," chorused the Third Grade. "Let heem tell. She can espick so good the English."

"Well, Ramon," acquiesced Miss Lipscomb, smiling. "Would you like to tell Raphael something about what we are all trying to do here as good Americans?"

Thus gratifyingly entreated, the chosen spokesman arose, adjusted his dashing red neckerchief, and faced his audience, graciously, yet with authority, as one born to dispense information.

Raphael had never heard of inferiority complexes and the perils of yielding to them; therefore he watched the debonair Ramon with all his wistful, self-deprecatory soul in his eyes. To be like this—so elegant, so careless, so sure of one's self!

"Here we try be the good American, Ticher," began Ramon, easily. "To be the good American," he explained, "one doss not fight weeth the knife or throw the stone or shoot the crap in the yard off the school."

Ticher made a mental note that it might be well to find out where a good American—like Ramon, for instance—did "shoot the crap."

"To be the good American, one doss not tell the lie." Ramon thoughtfully cocked a bright black eye at the top of the blackboard. "Eet iss not to be the good American," he offered innocently in enlargement of his text, "when Conchita poot into hees desk my new pencil and tells that she doss not see it."

"Ticher, no, ma'am! Eet iss not the pencil of Ramon," shrieked Concha Florida. "In my desk iss onlee——"

"*No importa* (it is no matter)," shrugged Ramon with

lordly tolerance. "That Concha, she eats hees pencils. I do not lig eaten pencils. I can buy awthers."

What magnificence! thought Raphael. One would do well to watch this dashing person and learn from him, when one obviously had so much to learn to be like the others and to please the pretty lady at the desk, who smiled at one so gently.

Now the lady spoke rather shortly.

"Go on, Ramon," she commanded. "What has all this to do with sneezing?"

"To be the good American," went on Ramon, "one keeps clean the body and the clothes. One breathes by hees nose weeth the window open, always the fresh air. To breathe the bad air iss lig to drink the dirty water. Eet iss full off thoss bug that call heemself 'my-my-my-cubs.' No, no, Ticher. Eet iss not so that they call heemself. Eet iss——"

"Microbes," suggested Miss Lipscomb, and put her handkerchief to her face as if she, too, were about to sneeze.

"Ticher, yess, ma'am. Eet iss heem that mag us seek. And to cough and sneeze weethout to cover the mouth," Ramon's voice dropped impressively a minor third, "iss to fill weeth thoss my-my-weeth thoss dirty bug the clean air." The lecturer's tense face and dramatically waving hands suggested an atmosphere swarming with loathsome, slimy monsters.

At his suggestive pantomime the wide-eyed Raphael cringed in his corner, shuddering at thought of the unknown horrors he had unwittingly loosed upon his hapless school-mates.

"They get inside off us," went on Ramon with unmistakable gusto, "and eat on us, and they——"

"That will do, Ramon." Ticher cut the discourse short, startled by the shrinking horror in the eyes Raphael turned upon her. "Now give Raphael one of those pieces of clean cloth from the closet. I am sure that he will never sneeze without covering his face again."

Indeed Raphael would not. As if in anticipation of some cataclysmic attack of hay fever, he thereafter hoarded in his bulging pockets clean rags of all sizes and shapes, and kept his nose chastely buried in one of them much of the time, coming up only when air was necessary for the efficient per-

formance of his scholastic duties. It was not enough for Raphael that crimes against the public safety should be rebuked after their commission. He fervently believed in the traditional ounce of prevention.

"Ticher," he would burst out in a frantic stage whisper, suddenly starting from his seat to point a rigid forefinger, "Ticher, I thing Jesus is going to sneeze. Pleass you espick heem queeck cover the nose."

His enthusiasm eventually won for him his appointment as "monitor of the handkerchiefs," in which capacity he dispensed from the store in the cupboard clean cloths to those members of the Third Grade who failed to equip themselves for emergencies. The performance of this duty was a holy rite to Raphael; for did it not mean that he, in his humble way, was, like the brilliant Ramon, learning to be "the good American"?

This appointment was Raphael's one triumph, for he was not very versatile, hopelessly lacking, indeed, in those graceful accomplishments whereby Ramon held enslaved his little public. The only time Raphael had attempted to join his class in song, those directly about him had become immediately voiceless with wonder and delight. Emilia Villa, when questioned by Ticher as to why she did not sing, had explained all too frankly, "But, Ticher, how can I e-sink when that Raphael e-sinks? That noiss she mags—eet iss too awful!" And Raphael had seen Manuelo Habanera executing with his hands at his ears a peculiar fan-like movement whose suggestion was unmistakable.

About a month after Raphael entered school Ticher told the class about the proposed Americanization exercises, to be held here in their own schoolroom. There were to be songs and speeches, and there would be people there, she told the Third Grade, many people, to see and hear them. And—ultimate thrill—there would be a prize, offered by the Big Boss of the mining company that owned the town, for the pupil who had proved himself most truly American.

During the discussion of the programme, Ramon scored very neatly by a humorous suggestion that Raphael be allowed to sing.

But Miss Lipscomb had come to Raphael's rescue with a lovely smile.

"No, indeed, Ramon," she said. "I have something much nicer than singing for Raphael to do."

The inference was that singing was something that any one could do, that Raphael's talents were not to be wasted on mere singing.

When the "something nicer" was explained to Raphael, he was dazzled by the importance of the rôle for which he was cast.

The "piece" in which Raphael was to appear was to be the third number of the entertainment. Eleven children were to recite in chaste and lofty verse the merits of hygienic and wholesome living. Each individual verse was a separate unit with a theme of its own, and the initial of each theme was one of the letters that spell "Health First." It was to be Raphael's part to bring forth at their appointed times these letters, cut from cardboard and gayly coloured, and to assemble them on their elevated standards behind the group who recited. When he thought of the tremendous responsibility this involved, his hands and feet became cold and his breath short with apprehension.

The day of the exercises dawned inauspiciously with a raw desert wind racing across the mesa, bearing before it a screen of sand, which it hurled at the rattling schoolroom windows. Such a wind portended inevitably, as Raphael—monitor of the handkerchiefs—had come to know, a day of much coughing and sneezing, for your Mexican child is a delicate plant shivering pitifully from the least draft. Raphael thought that he must ask Ticher if there were plenty of nice clean rags in stock.

He forgot to do this, however, in the excitement of the first few minutes in the delightful holiday atmosphere that had invaded the schoolroom.

Even Ticher seemed different as she distributed small flags that the children were to wear. She had on a dress of blue silk, the colour of her eyes, with a soft lace collar; her cheeks were flushed and her eyes large and brilliant.

Raphael wanted very much to make her proud of him to-day, to show that he was "the good American." He wanted to tell her so.

But all the other good Americans had things to tell her, too. Hysterically they demanded her attention. About her

bobbed many ribbon bows of extravagant size and brightness, poised like magic butterflies upon dark locks ordinarily restrained only by wrapping cord or good sensible shoestring.

On the outskirts of the group hovered the boys, whose concessions to the occasion took the less exotic form of astonishingly clean shirts and of neckties borrowed from fathers or elder brothers—all except the exquisite Ramon. Ramon outcarmined in his splendour the proverbial little red wagon, elegant from head to foot with newly barbered locks, white shirt, gay striped tie of orange and red, and new shoes—shiny new shoes, of a soul-satisfying squeakiness which necessitated many bustling trips to and fro across the room.

Raphael ruefully compared them with his own unpretentious footwear, a somewhat worn pair of buttoned boots which yawned obtrusively where several buttons were missing. The tips turned up about two inches from the ends where his toes stopped. It was impossible to bustle importantly in boots like these; indeed, they were only too likely even at a moderate pace to trip one whose movements were uncertain at best.

Raphael looked often for assurance down at his shirt. It was not new, not new enough to make him feel vulgarly overdressed, and it was much too large for him; but the pattern still showed in a pleasing red polka dot, and it was refreshingly clean. He rubbed his hand fondly over its smooth, starched surface.

Suddenly the monitor of the handkerchiefs was recalled to his duties by the sound of a stentorian sneeze. Peering anxiously about for the offender, he saw Jesus Estradilla just throwing back her head, eyes closed, mouth open, for another ecstatic outburst. He was saved from the necessity for official interference by the fact that Jesus had already unpinning the safety pin that fastened her handkerchief to her waist and now held the bit of muslin dramatically poised for action. Raphael was relieved, for Jesus was always unpleasantly on the defensive against interferences with her personal liberties.

"You, Raphael Arcienega," she had once told him severely, "you wipe your own nose—and I wipe mine. Eh? *Bueno!*"

However, the incident reminded him of something. He really must confer with Ticher to learn whether the stock of clean rags in the closet would be adequate to any emergency.

The closet was still locked and Ticher had the key. Timidly he elbowed his way through the group of clamouring classmates about Miss Lipscomb's desk and plucked gently at her elbow.

"Ticher," he murmured, "iss in the closet lots off the rag for the nose? I thing thees day mooch sneezing and——"

"Ticher, when I espick 'There hanks the flag,' do I point weeth wheech hand?" Pedro Gonzalos had rudely pushed Raphael aside.

But Hortensia Valdes had also elbowed herself into the foreground.

"Please, Ticher," she complained, importantly, "please you tell Gilberto Villa not to mag wink the eye to me when I e-sink my song. Eet mag me feel verree fonny, and een my song iss nawthing fonny." Hortensia's plain face was tense with the anxiety of the true interpretive artist; her bony fingers were twisting and pulling at her lawn skirt.

"Don't do that, Hortensia; you'll spoil your pretty dress. No. Surely you must not wink at Hortensia, Gilberto," confirmed Miss Lipscomb. "Her song is not funny."

"But, Ticher, yess, ma'am," objected Gilberto, rakishly, "eet iss Hortensia that iss fonny. When she roll up the eye, so—and wave the arm, so—I thing she weel say next, 'Cock-a-doodle-doo.'"

In the laughter that drowned Hortensia's indignant outburst, Raphael again took heart to pluck Miss Lipscomb's elbow and murmur, "Ticher, ticher, iss in the cupboard lots off the rag for the nose? I thing thees day——"

"Ticher, pleass," Gilberto Villa had wriggled into the foreground, "pleass you tell Felipe not to heet so mooch the drum. I cannot hear myself e-sink when she do so. Can I e-sink eef I do not hear heemself?"

"Ticher," Raphael began patiently for the third time, thrusting himself daringly in front of the indignant Gilberto, "iss in the desk lots off the rag for the nose? Many already sneeze. I thing——"

"Say, you Raphael," threatened Gilberto, "eet iss I that espick now."

"Raphael iss afraid that she weel forget hees speech," tittered Concha Florida. "He has so verree mooch to say."

Before this unkind taunt Raphael shrank back, utterly abashed.

"Me, also, I am afraid," confessed Emilia Villa, breathlessly. "I am so mooch afraid that my estomach aches me."

Raphael was again stretching forth a timid hand when a sudden squawk of anguish from the corner of the room riveted Ticher's attention.

Anita Perez stood at bay, frantically protecting her gorgeous new white dress against the teasing, dirty paws of Felipe. Near by Manuelo clownishly repulsed an imaginary attack upon his own coveralls with mincing falsetto shrieks. As Miss Lipscomb rushed to Anita's rescue, there was a general cry of, "Ticher, ticher, the bell rinks. The bell rinks! Now weel they come—all thoss people. Oh, my!"

Miss Lipscomb gently loosened Raphael's clinging fingers and pushed him toward his seat.

"Go and sit down, Raphael," she said. "And don't worry about your part. You do it perfectly."

Fluttering with excitement the Third Grade sat down and viewed itself with fatuous approval.

While Miss Lipscomb was calling the roll, two strident sneezes sounded through the room. They came from Emilia Villa and Angela Robles. Raphael, watching with apprehensive eyes, saw that they produced no handkerchiefs. And Gilberto Villa was coughing openly, shamelessly, right into the atmosphere which must be breathed by the Third Grade and its guests. It was just what Raphael had dreaded. But that it should happen on this day of all others, to shame Miss Lipscomb and the Third Grade before an enlightened public who would know, of course, that the good American does not sneeze or cough without using the handkerchief! Well, he must do what he could to avert the scandal.

Brazenly he flourished his hand when the roll call was over.

"Ticher," he reported, firmly, "Angela, Emilia, and Gilberto—he cough and sneeze, and he have nawthing to cover the face. I must have rags."

"Oh, surely," said Ticher, and unlocked the cupboard door. Apprehensively Raphael stepped inside and raised his hand to the accustomed shelf. Then he knew the worst. Only one clean rag remained. With despair settling upon his spirit, he saw the first guests enter the room. He saw, too,

that as they did so, Gilberto coughed raucously and, as if by signal, the Third Grade burst into a medley of excited coughs. Frantically he tried to think—to plan. Ticher was too busy receiving the new arrivals to be bothered. And, after all, it was Raphael, monitor of the handkerchiefs, who had been criminally remiss in his vigilance. Well, he must think what to do.

Covetously he eyed the filmy white of Anita Perez's new frock. What beautiful handkerchiefs that would make! But Anita sat in the far corner of the room. Sober reflection convinced Raphael that, in any event, Anita was not the person to sacrifice her elegance—even to save the day for the Third Grade. But girls did wear white things—underneath, where they could never be missed.

In front of Raphael sat Emilia Villa. Raphael leaned forward and prodded Emilia's plump back with a determined forefinger. Emilia turned upon him coldly questioning eyes.

"You take off the clothes—the onderneath clothes," directed Raphael, ruthlessly.

Emilia stared at him in open-mouthed horror.

"The white clothes," insisted Raphael in a hoarse whisper. "Take heem off. To mag the rag for the nose. Many sneeze——"

Before his desperate look Emilia shrank to the edge of her seat in a panic. Her eyes and mouth opened to their widest extent. Obviously she was about to shriek for help. Terrified at the consequences of his rashness, Raphael cowered back into his corner. Eventually Emilia thought better of it; she did not scream. But it was evident that he could expect no coöperation from her. He must think of something else. If only he wore skirts. Then, suddenly, Raphael's eyes kindled. Raphael knew now what to do.

No one noticed the frightened little boy who stole quietly from his seat near the door and vanished into the hallway. No one saw him return five minutes later, except Miss Lipscomb, who looked slightly startled at first; then smiled comprehendingly as she noted that he was wearing his heavy coat.

"I think, Pedro," she smiled to the monitor of the register, "that you had better close a window and give us some more heat."

Clad of Pedro's important clatter, Raphael moved hurriedly about the room, and did not take his seat until the bundle of rags that he carried was exhausted.

Immediately, it seemed, the programme was under way. Ramon, all bland smiles and eloquent gestures, explained to the guests how the Third Grade "learn to be the good American," and sat down, dimpling under a thunderous applause. People whispered about him and smiled.

Meantime, Raphael, in his corner near the big register, had begun to grow uncomfortably warm. Pedro had been liberal in his construction of what Ticher meant by "some heat." The perspiration was running out from under Raphael's heavy hair and trickling down his face. He felt unpleasantly sticky under his coat—but he did not take it off.

When the fateful moment came at which he must rise and make his way to the front of the room, he was so utterly palsied with fear that all his conscious effort was directed to guiding his stumbling feet up the aisle. At one side of the open space used as a stage he took his place near the gayly coloured letters that it was his present duty to display.

The eleven speakers also took their places along the front of the stage with much crowding and surging of the line. Raphael gripped the letter "H" and waited. Anita touched the ruffles of her skirt, coughed delicately behind a lace-edged handkerchief, and opened her mouth to speak. But suddenly Miss Lipscomb, who had been looking strangely at Raphael, rose and stepped over to him.

"You must take off your coat, Raphael," she said.

Raphael desperately cleared his throat. The eyes he turned upon her were piteous as he murmured in his thin, high voice, "No, no! Cold, Ticher. Too cold."

"Nonsense, Raphael," she whispered. "You're dripping with perspiration; you'll be sick."

And, disregarding the frantic appeal in his upturned face, she firmly drew off his coat and threw it over her arm.

A gasp that was almost a shriek went up from the shocked Third Grade. For under that coat, above the belt line, was nothing but Raphael. Ticher hastily shrouded his shrinking nudity again in the coat and signalled peremptorily for the performance to go on.

What followed was to Raphael a waking nightmare. Sweat-

ing copiously at every pore, with eyes downcast and limbs trembling with mortification, he staggered back and forth, dragging into their places the gay letters that illuminated the text which the good Americans at the front of the stage were bravely expounding to a persistent accompaniment of titters and whispers.

Finally, amid riotous applause they took their seats. There was a special salvo for Raphael, and all eyes followed him. But he was not deceived. This was not the honest tribute paid to the true artist like Ramon. Raphael had spoiled the show and he knew it. He had shocked, with his nakedness, the delicate sensibilities of the Third Grade's gentle public. What was almost as bad, the carefully constructed legend at the back of the stage spelled not HEALTH FIRST but HEALF THIRST.

Back in his warm corner by the register, Raphael shed perspiration and tears, his heart sick with shame, his face buried in his arms.

Miss Lipscomb watched him pitifully as the exercises went on. She longed to comfort him; and, still more, she longed for a solution to the mystery. For she knew that Raphael had worn a shirt when he came to school that morning. In the midst of the ringing final chorus one of the ladies turned to her.

"I wish you would tell me—I have been wondering all afternoon," she whispered, "why so many of your children have handkerchiefs exactly alike. Do they buy them by the piece?"

Ticher sat up very straight and stared. For the first time she realized that this was true, and that there was something hauntingly familiar about the colour scheme of those handkerchiefs—a dull cream background, faintly flecked with red. Suddenly her face rippled into an understanding smile, so radiant that the Third Grade involuntarily beamed in response. Even Raphael, who had raised his shamed eyes for the first time, saw, and was so infinitely cheered that he straightened up and prepared to give his attention to the rest of the programme.

Even now the Big Boss from the mill was rising, an expression of mingled amusement and doubt on his smooth, fair face. But as he stepped forward, Ticher suddenly did a

strange thing. Half-rising from her chair, she plucked him by the sleeve, and, drawing him back into his seat, began to talk to him rapidly and eagerly.

Finally he stepped to the flag-draped table. From his vest pocket he took a small velvet case, which he opened and placed upon the desk at his side. The Third Grade drew a deep breath. Over the edge of the little box they caught the flash of gold. There were excited whispers among which Ramon's name was audible. Ramon, in the front row, tried to look unconscious and succeeded only in making his eyes blank and Indian-like, while his little chin quivered and his teeth chattered.

The Big Boss told them what an impressive occasion this had been, at which they beamed complacently; and what a remarkable teacher they had, at which they applauded uproariously; and how gratified he was to know that they were striving for such lofty ideals. And now it was his pleasant duty to bestow the medal which had been awarded to the pupil who had, throughout the year, shown himself most truly American. Would Ramon Sedillo step forward?

Ramon Sedillo did. Perhaps it would be more truthful to say that Ramon Sedillo swaggered forward, but we must remember that it is not every day that a small Mexican boy receives from the Big Boss a medal for true Americanism. When Ramon retired after the ceremony, rosy and smiling, he was followed by the happy applause of his proud classmates.

Then something not provided for in the programme happened. The Big Boss unfastened from his pocket a heavy gold watchfob on a rich black ribbon. As he placed this, also, on the table beside him, he winked solemnly at Ticher. For a moment he did not seem to know what to say. His face worked and became very red. The Third Grade watched in polite concern; Miss Lipscomb, in open alarm. Finally he began to talk.

Because of something unforeseen that had happened that afternoon, he told them, it had been decided to bestow another prize for—for—well, in short, for distinguished service in the cause of Americanism. All year, he reminded them, Miss Lipscomb had held before them the idea that true Americans, to avoid spreading disease germs among their innocent

companions, always, in coughing or sneezing, hold handkerchiefs before their faces. Now, doubtless they had observed that one member of the class had, throughout the performance that afternoon, worn a heavy coat, in spite of the fact that he must have been uncomfortably warm. Could they guess why?

Audible snickers indicated that this question was unfortunate. The Third Grade was quite sure that it knew why.

The speaker hurried on, a queer break in his voice. It was because, he said, that member of the class had noticed that on this great day, this day so important to the cause of Americanization, some members of the class had forgotten to bring their handkerchiefs, and had actually been coughing and sneezing without restraint.

The Third Grade squirmed guiltily. And what, the speaker wanted to know, had this good American done? In order that his classmates might cough, sneeze, and blow their noses with clear consciences, he had actually, to make handkerchiefs for them, sacrificed his own shirt. Here the Big Boss abruptly had recourse to his own handkerchief. Miss Lipscomb watched him nervously, until, still choking a little, he went on to the grand climax of his remarks.

It had been decided, therefore, to reward this good American for his conspicuous presence of mind and bravery. Would Raphael Arcienega please step forward?

But Raphael Arcienega was quite beyond that effort. It was only with Ticher's encouraging hand under his elbow that he managed to stumble to the front of the room amidst a dumfounded silence.

Not until the Big Boss was actually pinning the splendid jewel upon Raphael's coat did the full significance of the ceremony burst upon the Third Grade.

Then, as Raphael faced them, flushed and smiling unsteadily from the greatest happiness he had ever known, the dazzling truth was forced upon him.

Ramon Sedillo, the good American, was generously leading the applause.

PROGRESS

By HARRIET WELLES

From Scribner's

EACH of the epochal changes in Jem Brown's life coincided with a milestone on the road of progress. The first came on that day when, with the rest of the settlers in a southwestern hamlet, he went out to view the arrival of the United States Government's camel herd—advocated and sponsored by Secretary of War Jefferson Davis to overcome the difficulties in the transportation of war materials to isolated military posts on the Western plains.

Jem was so small that he did not scorn the support offered by his mother's draggled calico skirt, as he stumbled along beside her over the deeply rutted road to the edge of the town. As always, his mother paid no attention to his breathless endeavour to match her headlong speed. Meg Brown was generally alluded to by the men of the settlement with the lenient adjective of flighty; the women were not so tolerant.

Commented storekeeper Smith to his wife: "Quit pickin' on Meg, Sallie! She can't help it that she ain't bright!"

"She's bright enough to get along without doin' enough real work to keep her blood circulatin'," replied his wife, grimly—and spoke the truth. Mrs. Brown's methods of gaining a livelihood were as vague as her explanations concerning her former habitation, her widowed state, and Jem's paternity.

"She can't remember her own stories," Mrs. Smith had asserted more than once when her husband attempted to laugh away Meg Brown's erratic behaviour.

"Well, I reckon Jem's pa must a-been a pretty good sort, 'cause Jem had to take after *somebody*—an' he's too steady to favour his ma. Have you ever noticed how crazy that little kid is about mountains?"

Childless Mrs. Smith nodded and wistfully voiced an old wonderment: "How come such a triflin' woman to have such a good child?"

She wondered it again on this morning when, with the rest of the townsfolk, she awaited the arrival of the first camel train. Jem had sidled shyly over to her, slipping a small grimy hand into hers. His mother, lost in the enjoyment of vociferous argument concerning the camels' origin, had completely forgotten his existence.

"Bill Smith told me they come to America on a navy ship from foreign parts, an' they got a parcel o' black drivers with 'em!" Meg Brown quoted, shrilly. "Bill says as how they couldn't *never* build a railroad 'cross the country, 'count of the desert, an' it bein' too far between waterin' places—but camels don't need no water!"

"There ain't nuthin' livin' that don't need *some* water!" commented Mrs. Bill Smith with an emphasis entirely disproportionate to the subject under discussion.

Meg Brown instantly agreed with her adversary: "That's what *I* told Bill—but *you* know how he is!"

Ensued a silence, broken by someone's discovery of the first glimpse of the approaching camels, and as they came slowly nearer silence again descended. There was about the strange beasts nothing American—nothing to strike an answering chord of real or fancied resemblance. Only the brand of the United States upon their sides linked them up with any vestige of usualness—even the copper bells on the straps about their necks gave out an alien unfamiliar tinkle. . . . Jem Brown, observing four dark-skinned Arab drivers, strengthened his grasp upon the hand of his friend, the storekeeper's wife, as he watched the cameleers dismount.

Meg Brown boldly approached the blond Texan in charge: "Helloa! *Glad to see you!* . . . Say, what're they a-chewin'? . . . Ain't they proud-lookin'?" She smiled with ingratiating friendliness.

The man in charge recognized her type. "Sure, sister! They've been haughty an' set-up ever since we branded 'em!"

She welcomed his pleasantry with loud laughter. "Say, wasn't there no *new* camels where them came from? These look so kinda rough an' ragged—didn't they have no sleek ones?"

"You're smart, ain't you?" His tone was resentful. "These is the pick of the camel crop! That big feller there was a present to the United States from the King of Tunis—and kings don't give away no second-handed camels!"

Meg was properly impressed. "I never seen *none* before. I don't know a thing about 'em," she apologized.

"Your talk showed that! I guess you're like the Turk camel doctor in Tunis that tried to come along with the herd; he aimed to cure colds with cheese, an' swelled legs with tea an' gunpowder; if they didn't get better then, he tickled their noses with chameelyuns' tails," he commented, loftily, then unbent: "A sailor who came over on the ship with 'em did tell me that them heathens in Tunis worked off two camels that had the itch, on us."

"For the land's sake! . . . How can you tell the itchin' ones? They all look so kinda fretted an' mussed up!"

He stiffened again. "The partic'lar reason is, that neither of 'em was brought home; soon's they found out what was their complaint they sold 'em to a Turk butcher who's cust'mers wasn't int'rested in peddygrees." He paused to glance down at the fascinated Jem. "Say, young feller, how'd you like for me to lift you up on one of the camels?" Then, as the little boy drew back, the camel man addressed the storekeeper's wife: "Your kid's shy, ma'am."

Meg Brown had no intention of relinquishing any advantage she might gain with the masterful stranger: "He ain't hers. He's mine!"

"Well, bein' shy, he sure don't favour *you*!" commented the Texan, and turned away to give some directions concerning the care of the camels for the night.

Having looked their fill, the people began to disperse. Meg Brown stayed on. The man in charge had attracted her vagrant interest; she hung about him laughing and talking. And since the youthful tinge of abundant health was in her colouring, the gleam of bronze in her heavy shining hair, her evident preference for the stranger's society found response.

Late that evening, half aroused from deep sleep, small Jem heard the voice of the man in charge raised in argument with his mother: "You say that you don't like it here, that the women is uppish with you—why d'you stay? . . . I always say: when you only have one life to live, have a good

time while you can! . . . What? . . . The boy? . . . If that's all you've got to bother you, you're in luck! . . . That woman who's husband keeps the store'll be *glad* to get Jem—" There followed a confused jumble of detached directions concerning an early departure. And when, shortly after dawn, Jem awakened, it was to find the cabin deserted, his mother gone; the fascinating stranger's lure of riding forth to new untroubled fields, upon a camel's back, had been too much for Meg Brown to resist.

What became of her, her son never learned. Wistfully he wondered why, if she had gone toward the mountains, she had not taken him along. But the settlement was not disturbed again by her.

. . . With the outbreak of the Civil War, the United States Government retired from the camel industry, the herds were scattered, strayed away. Quite recently one of the camels, bearing the old brand, was seen in a Mexican circus but otherwise—like Meg Brown—they have disappeared into oblivion—superseded milestones upon the highway of progress.

The next years were busy uneventful ones for Jem Brown. The man in charge of the camel train proved himself to be an expert in passing snap judgment; the storekeeper's wife took immediate and affectionate charge of the little boy—and never regretted it. Jem more than paid his way, carrying water in pails which increased in size with his own growth; running endless errands upon willing feet; planting and weeding Mrs. Smith's vegetable garden and helping her in the kitchen; working behind the counter of the store—but always, when he had a little time to himself, he went out beyond the edge of the town to stare, hungry-eyed, toward the mountains rimming the wide valley.

He was nineteen when an epidemic of typhoid carried off the Smiths within two days of each other and left him, without ties or funds, to face the future. His foster-father's partner urged him to stay on in the store, offered inducements, but Jem was not to be beguiled; restlessness had overtaken him. "It's gettin' crowded-like here; too many folks." Unconsciously he made a gesture toward the rainbow-tinted mountain peaks swinging up through the bright air under a

sky of ineffable blue. "Long's the Smiths was alive an' wanted me, I figgered I owed it to 'em to stay. But now they've went, you oughta see that I got to be a-movin' toward the hills!" explained Jem Brown, querulously.

What he sought—the means for sustaining life among the mountains—he did not immediately achieve; instead, for several years, he drifted: clerking in remote stores and trading posts, driving mail and stage coaches, working about the mines. All through the West during those strenuous days the talk and fever of gold waxed as steadily persistent as the lilt of wind through the pines. Fortunes were made and lost with an ease and frequency which bred conversational unconcern. Jem Brown, drifting with the ebb and flow, clerking behind counters at which prospectors bought their coffee and bacon, swinging his whip from the driver's seat of stage-coaches, listened carefully to the unceasing talk of lodes and strikes, of faults and contacts. Pocket hunting for small rich deposits of ore near the earth's surface was, he early learned, the most possible and profitable form of gold mining for an amateur without capital; thoughtfully he studied the rules for this endeavour until the day when, having achieved a small surplus, he bade farewell to the settlements and went on his own account toward the mountains.

His progress was a leisurely business of working down the ranges; in time he covered a surprisingly large area of wandering, became impervious to weather or hardship, lived almost entirely off the land. There were trout in abundance in all the deep pools, quail and doves everywhere for the snaring, edible plants and roots along all the water-courses. Sometimes, swinging into sight of the gleaming hedge of tin cans encircling a town, Jem Brown smelled the aroma of boiling coffee or sizzling bacon and succumbed to early memories by patronizing an eating-house or the store; but, as the years went by, he found walls and a roof increasingly unbearable, was happy only when he was among the wind-tilted cedars of the high country or panning out gravel in the rocky shallows of some mountain stream; inevitably, with so much looking, he made occasional finds which were always more than sufficient to supply his few needs. And as, with his primitive equipment, he washed down the loose floating gold against a sheepskin, Jem Brown did not know that the famed Golden

Fleece of the Argonauts was obtained through the same manipulations.

It was after one of these profitable finds that, journeying down toward the settlement with his ore, he fell in with other prospectors and heard the new talk of a railroad over which the first transcontinental train was soon to make its triumphal progress. The whole account was so amazing and incredible that Jem Brown determined to see it for himself; laboriously he notched off on a stick the number of days which would ensue before the great event.

Through some error in his checking system he arrived at the nearest railroad town a day late; the epoch-making train had passed, but reliable witnesses testified to having seen it, and led him out to look at the shining rails. Frowning, he pondered over the advisability of lingering about until the performance should be repeated, and decided in favour of it.

He was influenced in his decision by the presence of a small circus operating, for a week, in a cleared field at the town's edge, and by the discovery that among the chief exhibits was a frowsy camel, bearing upon its side the brand of the United States, counterbranded by a subsequent purchaser. But by no stretch of imagination could he connect the swarthy Mexican who rode the camel with the tall and blond young Texan of the cavalcade of his early memories; nor could his close observation of the circus folk off duty reveal any woman who might be his mother. This possibility being dismissed, he went conscientiously through the attractions offered, commencing with the tent performances and working slowly down to the last of the side-shows. Gravely he inspected the cherry-coloured horse, the laughing duck, the cow with four hind legs, the cat with three tails, the bearded lady; but through two afternoons it was the armless woman with the trained feet who completely fascinated him; breathlessly he watched her through the achievement of threading a needle and darning a sock, writing her name and the name of the town and State, fanning herself. Then, taking up a small saw, she commenced with some effort to demolish a plank. It was a most arduous procedure. Jem Brown, worriedly observing the exertion expended, forgot his shyness and offered advice:

"Ma'am, if you'd get that saw filed—if you'd just only get *that saw filed*——"

She paused in her undertaking to eye him grimly: "Young feller, I guess maybe you're right, because you're about the seventieth man that's told me that this week——" She sighed heavily. "What'd you think if I told you that I've been a-exhibitin' ever since early this mornin', and ain't had a bite to eat?"

He was immediately sympathetic. "Ain't that too bad! Could I bring you a hot bologna, ma'am?"

"I don't eat bolognas," answered the lady, austere. "But I guess there wouldn't be no kick, if I was pressed to go to the eatin'-house before I drop in my tracks. Talk about *your* feet gettin' tired——"

He was divided between panic at the thought of escorting the celebrity through the crowd and utter horror over the possibility of having to watch her eat, or feeding her himself. Even as he hesitated, glancing frantically about in search of an avenue of escape, someone behind him spoke:

"Couldn't you go get somethin' an' bring it in here to her? I know the folks that run the eatin'-house an' they'll loan you the dishes to fetch it on, if I say so."

Jem Brown turned thankfully to face a young girl, small and very frail, with hollow eyes and a hectic colour.

"Maybe you'd be willin' to go with me?" he stammered.

She agreed. "I live at the eatin'-house—wait on table there. My name's Jenny—Jenny Burke——" She broke off in a paroxysm of violent coughing; when she had finished there was a bright stain on the handkerchief she held against her lips. "Ain't it. . . *awful* . . . to be sick? I'm so scared I can't hold my job—but it's gettin' to be more than I can do to lift the trays," she confided to him.

Again he forgot his shyness: "You oughtn't to be a-tryin' to lift trays. Where's your folks? Why don't someone look out for you?"

"I ain't got no folks. And Mis' Flynn at the eatin'-house is a widow woman with a big fam'ly of children. . . . Here it is!"

She quickly made the arrangements for the armless wonder's food, took the money to Mrs. Flynn, and returned with the message that she was to go with him and bring back the dishes. "We're short on plates, an' those show people is careless an' forgetful-like."

Together they returned toward the side-show. "I ain't met you before. I suppose you come to see the railroad train go past? Where do you live?" inquired Jenny Burke, politely.

Above the tray he carried Jem Brown indicated the distant peaks with a motion of his head: "In the mountains——"

"Do you now? . . . Way off there! . . . Ain't it lonely?"

"Not so lonely as the towns. An' the air's clear an' clean an' smells sweet of pine-trees. I'd die—if I had to live down here."

She sobered. "I'd like the smell of pines an' the clear air, too. I don't sleep nights for worryin' over what's to become of me when I can't work no more. Mis' Flynn can't feed her own fam'ly. . . . Say, what happens to girls that ain't got no money, nor folks, when they lose their jobs?" She stopped to wipe her eyes. But when they reached the side-show tent her gaiety had returned; briskly she approached the armless lady. "Gee! She ain't got halfway through that plank yet!" cried Jenny Burke, and interrupted herself with another spasm of dreadful coughing.

Jem Brown stayed in the town long enough to see a train go by upon the shining rails, then returned to the hills. But this time he did not go alone, the girl Jenny rode beside him on a pack burro. And this drastic change in his life had come about so simply. Even weary Mrs. Flynn's conscientious unwillingness to be rid of Jenny "unless it was all right" was overcome by Jem's readiness to be married by Father Collins.

"No'm, I ain't got no other wife anywhere. An' I ain't marryin' Jenny to get a wife. Once, when I was a kid, I got left in the lurch, an' some folks looked out for me. I'm handin' it on to her. She's too sick to work, an' I'm a-figurin' I can make her comfort'ble in one of them cabins the Guayule outfit abandoned when their lode petered out. . . . It's a real pretty place—high up, with a good spring near. I've got money enough to buy all the bacon an' coffee an' stuff she wants. . . . Ma'am? . . . Yes'm. . . . I don't mind gettin' married—even if it don't *mean* nothin' to me. . . . Ma'am? . . . Well, you see, I can make more money'n I can use, an' Jenny can't make enough to get on with. Seems like—if I expect to have luck—it's only square for me to go shares with her"

Mrs. Flynn's eyes were suspiciously bright. "If ev'ry one felt that way life'd be—not so hard," was her only comment.

And so, immediately after the ceremony, they departed toward the mountains. Besides the bride's slight weight the burro carried supplies, Jenny's small bundle of clothing, and her one treasure, a book.

"A dude prospector left it at the eatin'-house—said he didn't want it no more—so Mis' Flynn gave it to me." Jenny spelled out the title: "'Seven Lamps of Ar-chi-tec-ture.' Ain't that a queer name?"

He nodded. "Real queer. I ain't never owned a book. Couldn't make sense out of it if I had."

"I'll read it to you," she promised. "Now tell me more 'bout the mountains."

This was familiar ground. All day, while the trail mounted steadily upward, he told her of the beasts and birds and trees, of the mother bear and her lame cub in Hell Roaring Canyon, the bluejays at Cypress Falls. "You can count on their bein' there sure's you can count on its bein' spring!"

"The reason you ain't never felt lonely's because you've got such lots of friends!" said Jenny, wistfully.

"You'll like 'em, too. Animals ain't same's folks, they don't disappoint you."

He was right. During the few months that remained to her she knew the happiest days in all of her short and pinched existence. The little cabin was a marvel of spacious comfort to her, the plentiful food an epicurean indulgence. It was already too late, when Jem Brown found her, to do more than make the remainder of her life easier; and though each day she achieved less and less, her hold on living slipped gently from her slight grasp.

She kept her word about reading aloud. Winter evenings when, outside the cabin, the snow blurred and drifted and the trail disappeared in a white smudge, she conscientiously took up their one book. True, much of it was unintelligible to both reader and listener, but, like some appealing theme in a classic overture, they came upon intervals which captured their attention.

"Ain't it a nice book, Jem? It says that if you can't afford much-money things, you should buy *the best* of stuff that you *can* afford—an' that's real comfort'ble 'cause it works right

down the line. . . . What is it that that is?
Sincerity! I like that! Just like sayin',
 'Jenny, you buy *good* calico 'stead of sleazy poplin!'"

Jem, lounging by the fireplace, proffered comment: "When you live outdoors you don't have to bother 'bout what's good or bad, it's all the best."

"I s'pose so—but ev'ry one ain't tough enough to stay out winter'n summer, the way you do. They have to come in to sleep at least."

"That's where they begin makin' theirselves lots of trouble! Read it again—where it tells about the houses folks build."

She opened the book. "'As regards domestic buildings, there must always be certain limitations to views of this kind in the power, as well as in the hearts of men, still I cannot but think it an evil sign of a people when their houses are built to last for one generation only.'"

He interrupted: "I'll bet the thin shacks down to the railroad town don't last no generation! They commence to sag 'fore they're finished!"

"That's true. I used to want to run outside the eatin'-house ev'ry time the wind blowed." She took up the book again. "Don't this sound like it was tellin' 'bout places we could put the name to?"

"'And I look upon those pitiful concretions of lime and clay which spring up, in militant forwardness, out of the kneaded fields about our capital—upon those thin, tottering, foundationless shells of splintered wood and imitated stone—upon those gloomy rows of formalized minuteness, alike without difference and without fellowship, as solitary as similar—not merely with the careless disgust of an offended eye, not merely with sorrow for a desecrated landscape, but with a painful foreboding that the roots of our national greatness must be deeply cankered when they are thus loosely stuck into their native ground, that those comfortless and unhonoured dwellings are the signs of a great and spreading spirit of popular discontent, that they mark the time when every man's aim is to be in some more elevated sphere than his natural one, and every man's past life is his habitual scorn—'" She stopped to cough, then glanced further down the page: "Here's some about you, Jem," she laughed; "'—the crowded tenements of a struggling and restless population differ only

from the tents of the Arab or the Gypsy by their less healthy openness to the air of heaven, and less happy choice of their spot of earth'—you're an Arab an' a Gypsy!" she teased.

"If likin' the air of heaven proves it, I am!"

Her expression became frightened and wistful: "Say, Jem, d'you know what I think heaven's a-goin' to be like? Well, there ain't a-goin' to be no towns there—just lots of mountains, an' pines an' space where folks can live the way *they* like, not the way someone else says! An' I wouldn't want no hard gold pavements an' streets to walk on—not if I could have a sunshiny trail instead—would you?"

Jem shook his head. "If there's such lots of good folks that it's crowded, I don't want to go there nohow." He thought it over. "Wherever there's plenty of folks, there's plenty of talk about progress. Know what progress is? . . . Well, it's inventin' somethin' to carry you over the country so fast that you can't see nothin' you're a-passin'. That's progress!"

"Like the railroad train!"

"Yes. I'm a-hopin' they'll be satisfied with that an' not go on a-inventin' any further."

"They can't never catch us—way up here!" she exulted.

He agreed to that. "We've stumped 'em!"

Jenny glanced down at the illustration of a tracery from the Campanile of Giotto at Florence. "Of course *all* the things them progressers have done ain't bad. Look at this! . . . Say, Jem, if ever you make a big strike let's us go an' see these places in the book." She hesitated. "An' if I ain't . . . around . . . just remember I would a-been if I could—an' you go anyhow. *Promise!*"

He laughed at such a preposterous idea, then, as she stubbornly insisted, indulgently agreed. "I'm per'ctly safe in sayin' yes!"

"Remember, *you've promised*. I'll ha'nt you if you break your word!"

"*Sure!*" said Jem Brown.

Jenny died in the autumn; for weeks before the end Jem devoted his entire time to her, heartening her against the hours of panic which preceded the Great Adventure.

"I don't want to go off by myself among strangers, Jem!

All my life, 'til you came, I ain't never had no one that b'longed *to me*! I don't want to start all over again!"

After she was gone, and he had awkwardly smoothed over the small mound under the wind-tilted cypresses, he shouldered his pick and shovel, packed his gold pan, coffee-pot, bread-tin, and frying-pan, and wandered lonesomely forth to face the most arduous winter of his experience.

He had spent the money gained through his last find on small luxuries for Jenny. For the first time since he started upon a career of pocket hunting, his luck did not hold. Perhaps his wistful memories and preoccupations made him dull and careless, but several times during that long winter of roaring winds, deep drifts, and bitter, blue-white cold he staggered back to the cabin on Guayule more dead than alive from hunger and exhaustion. It came to him during those months—when his thoughts turned homesickly toward the little hut—that the first thing he would do when he made another strike would be to buy the Guayule; Jenny's grave and the small house should be his. But three springs of long rains had followed three difficult winters before his luck turned, and he was able to make a small initial payment against the claims held by the defunct and bankrupt Guayule Mining Company.

"Thinkin' of kyotein' into that hill, stranger?" inquired the clerk at the nearest court-house. "*Don't do it!* That d—— Guayule formation's volcanic: the lode breaks off sharp when you'd least expect it, an' commences again three miles farther up, ten miles farther down, or 'round the corner on the next mountain, that's how the comp'ny sunk all they took out'n more, too. I know all about it, an' I bought my knowledge through investin' the legacy my wife got from her gran'-pap in the Guayule just before it finally busted. Darned near busted my married life—we don't joke on *that* subject at my house to this day! . . . There's high-grade ore in the Guayule, but it's prob'ly somewhere where it'd cost billions to get it out!"

Jem denied any such ambition. "No kyotein' into a hill for me! Pocket huntin's better; keeps you outdoors."

The clerk agreed. "Wanderin's fun—if you haven't got a fam'ly," he said, and made out the documents.

And then, almost as if fate had awaited his possession of

the papers, Jem Brown, listlessly investigating an iron stain on the rock wall below the spring, came upon his first appreciable find; for several days he examined certain details of his discovery and stood at last scowling down at the mat of floating gold particles in his pan, or staring with narrowed eyes at the place from which he had taken it. Here was fortune knocking! What answer should he make?

Irrelevantly half-forgotten scraps of overheard conversations between gold-hungry prospectors loitering about the trading-posts came back to him: cities, *women*, liquor, shop-worn girls, grimy pleasures. These were the prizes purchasable when money was plentiful; easy gifts of easy gains; frowning, he thought it over. Some instinct, which had made him detest towns and crave the austerities of the mountains, drew fastidiously back from contemplation of the proposed orgy. Meg Brown had only been his *mother*.

A little breeze stirred the trees and moved the blue gentians at his feet and, like a message, Jenny's eyes looked up at him. "*Remember—you promised!*" came back her voice.

What had he promised? Oh, yes! To visit those palaces and cathedrals of which she had read to him. "But, Jenny, I was only a-jokin'! I wouldn't a-promised if I'd thought I'd ever a-found this!" he expostulated aloud.

The gentians fluttered their fringed edges in the breeze. Jem Brown groaned. "I won't be bullied! . . . But if I go back on my word I s'pose you'll be a-remindin' me of it from every foot of ground!"

The gentians were very still, very blue. "Oh, well, I'll go!" he said, resignedly.

So commenced a pathetic odyssey. Amazed clerks in railroad and steamship offices listened to his terse stipulations, glimpsed his abundant moneys—and quickly arranged his itinerary.

He made a strange figure against the Old World back-grounds; his baggy readymade clothes attracted curious glances in the hotels which he patronized, accepting without comment, paying without question, for the quarters assigned him; and all the time dumbly enduring the smothering restrictions of four walls and a ceiling, or wandering, confused and miserable, through the clamorous babel of the cities. Of the other frequenters of fashionable hostelries he was en-

tirely oblivious; the women belonged to no species with which he was cognizant; to him they were not human beings but strange exotics, unfitted for the storm and stress of out-of-doors.

Only with the guides who piloted him about the palaces and cathedrals did he exchange conversation, and from them, since he was generous with tips, he won especial attention and privileges. And though Angelo, Giotto, Correggio, and Giorgione were less than names to Jem Brown the sincerity of their achievements were as a bridge to carry him back home; a sculptured tracery of leaves reminded him of certain trees on the windy ridges above Guayule and brought a lump in his throat; details of clear colour in a world-famous window danced like the deep sparkle of sunlight in the pool at Cypress Falls—and blurred before his gaze; the starred ceiling of an Italian chapel was but a pale imitation of the night sky above Guayule; the gentle eyes of a painted madonna were not so gentian-blue as Jenny's. . . . In a moment of panic he wondered if she was safe beneath the cypresses—coyotes were such inquisitive marauders—then sternly dismissed the thought. Jenny had planned this visit, had wanted him to see the cathedrals; he must go back to her with the assurance of their beauty—and what was it that the book had named as indivisible from true beauty? . . . Sincerity? . . . Truth? . . . Power? . . . Ah, yes: *Sacrifice!*

But at dawn on the morning after his return to Guayule he awakened to see the first pure light filter down through the pine branches, to smell the incense of the balsams, and to hear the lilting ecstasy of a choir of meadow-larks; looking and listening, Jem Brown breathed a deep sigh of ineffable content. He was safe at last, *safe*. He never reopened the cache below the spring—from which he had taken out the ore which paid for his journey abroad; in his mind that gold was consecrated to cities, to confusion, to *progress*. Jem Brown had done what Jenny asked—but he had finished forever with progress.

Ruskin had said in Jenny's book: "Men tire as they finish"; and Jem Brown, stumbling up the slope of Guayule, was increasingly convinced of the truth and wisdom of this statement. He, who had thought himself immune and impervious

to any whim of wind or weather, had come to discover nature too boisterous for him; like some injured animal, seeking refuge, he was crawling home at last to the protection of a roof and four walls. True, forty years had passed since he came back from his one journey away from the mountains—but what were forty years? . . . And yet . . . during that final climb of his life, the unnoted years caught up with him; he was almost ready to compromise. Sharp pain stabbed and nagged at him as, with sobbing breath, he came out upon the wide clearing around the little cabin and glanced apprehensively up to see whether the circling buzzards had marked his plight.

In the doorway he stopped again and turned to look out across the wide valley—rimmed with range after range of rainbow-tinted peaks—noting, far away, dim blue smoke and visualizing the forlorn settlement. The gold-fever had run its course in that locality; veins of ore near the surface had been exhausted, leaving the working of deep-seated lodes to future necessity, capital, and scientific exploitation. Long since, nature had healed the ugly scars of man's brief desecration of her slopes and had forgotten him. Boom towns, sprung up mushroom-wise, flourishing through a hectic period of roaring prosperity, were as quickly deserted—except for a handful of derelicts too shiftless or too discouraged to move on. No one questioned their right to tenancy of any of the scores of abandoned houses whose broken roofs sagged above the staggering walls and crazy floors. Jem Brown, during his infrequent sojourns in the town, hurried through his buying and, averting his eyes from the settlement's sordid squalor, turned his face thankfully back toward the streets of the mountains. Of what was going on in the world beyond the barrier of the ranges he neither knew nor cared.

Because he had been so happily self-sufficient, time had dealt lightly with Jem Brown; long since, the spell of the high places had claimed him, eradicating all man-made periods; the calendar of his year knew no artificial division into months, was punctuated by events in the swinging march of the seasons: the first deep snows, the sight of God's flocks of mountain-sheep breasting the shining drifts, spells of bitter, blue-white cold when timber-wolves, grown bold through hunger, howled in the clearing; long rains, a spring thaw and

freshet, and the earliest arrival in the processional of the flowers; summer, with larks and blue-birds; and columbines a-sway to every breeze . . . until the time when the rosy mauve of fireweed ran up the slopes and the deer star hung low in the sky. And always—*always*—the faithful gentians had come back.

Remembering these, and all of nature's concern for flower, bird, and beast, Jem Brown wondered with sudden petulance why she was so unmindful of man. Now that his life was so nearly over he pondered—divided between elation and resentment—upon what had happened to man's invention, progress . . . that, for so long a period, his life's path had gone by unpunctuated by one of her devastating milestones. Progress would need to hurry if she held anything in wait for him now! "She's welcome to do her worst!" he muttered aloud.

Three days later he regretted his challenge; half-awakening from feverish slumber, he blinked incredulously at a strange, far-away sound. Remote at first, then drawing slowly nearer, there was about its rhythmic, pulsing steadiness something appalling, threatening, and sinister. Jem Brown could not connect it with anything familiar. . . . A drum, perhaps? . . . But what could a drum be doing, high up in the air? He listened more closely, craving reassurance. There was none . . . instead the steady beat was developing into a monstrous humming—into a dull roar . . . but not like the intermittent crashing with which, during a landslide the year of the big rains, the towering pines and the huge rocks had gone down the mountain. . . .

Feverishly, he tossed and turned, trying to escape from the enveloping sound. Was this, perhaps, what was meant by *illness*: all sorts of breathless, groundless, vain imaginings *bred in houses*? Scornfully he derided himself for his cowardice in coming indoors. This noise at which he cowered was thunder—*thunder*, which had so often before volleyed and echoed in the mountains during fierce electrical storms. Defiantly he raised his head. The sound was still there, steady, regular, insistent—and *near*!

Dully he wondered if this was death—but why had he never been told what it would be like? Was death, then, a hideous, unending race through labyrinths of clamour and tumult? To him, who had spent his life in the stillness of

the mountains, what purgatory could equal that! Jem Brown cowered down, moaning . . . as the thunderous drumming came directly over the cabin, increased to a deafening roar, culminated in a series of shot-like explosions—and ceased. In the sudden uncanny quiet he could hear his own voice raised in a feeble whimper like a frightened child's. Of course it had been a dream, the feverish, half-consciousness of delirium . . . but how real for the moment, how hideously real. . . . "*What?*"

With terror the old man heard the sound of his first visitor, knocking; and saw the door swing back. . . .

A strange figure in leather clothes and a begoggled helmet stood in the opening, stared into the dim cabin, breathed an exclamation of relief: "I was afraid that this place was deserted—and I'm miles off my course! I've been trying for two hours to find a bare space to come down in; it was just by the merest chance that I saw this clearing—and none too good a landing field at that! Can you tell me where I am? What's the nearest town?" He stopped to look more closely at Jem Brown. "The light was so poor that I couldn't see you before! Are you sick? You look . . . *ghastly!*"

The old man could not answer.

The stranger stepped inside the cabin. "Isn't there something I could do for you? Water? Where can I get you a drink?"

Feebly Jem Brown pointed to the bucket, and indicated the direction of the spring. The young man returned with the brimming pail.

His decisive voice was clear: "If you can give me some idea of where I am, and the general direction, I think we'd better be on our way. I'll carry you out to the plane, and take you to a hospital. This is the *last* place for a sick man to be! Just now, by that spring, I saw a big bear and two cubs! You'd stand no chance—even if you were *able* to go for water!"

Jem Brown roused himself: "That's Mollie—I found her four-five years ago; guess her mother'd been killed, 'cause the wolves were yappin' round the poor little cuss. . . . She comes back an' hangs 'bout, every summer now, with *her* cubs. Mollie'd steal bacon'n bread . . . but she wouldn't touch me!"

"Maybe not. But anyhow you're too sick to be left here all by yourself."

"Did you . . . hear the roarin' . . . overhead, jus' 'fore you come in? What was it?"

"An airplane."

There was no gleam of understanding in the old man's eyes.

The aviator stared at him. "Can't you understand me? *A flying machine!* Don't you know what that means? . . . The invention which makes it possible for men to travel through the air like birds! The greatest achievement of modern progress!"

"You mean that . . . even here on the mountain tops. . . . I can't *get away*?"

"Away, from what? A plane can go *anywhere!*"

Jem Brown clambered weakly to his feet and stumbled to the doorway. In the centre of the clearing a strange, huge, grasshopper-like object stood at rest. It was silent now—but around it everything seemed changed and troubled—and at what moment might it not come to life again, hideously challenging the protesting echoes? How—*how*—could he get rid of it and of its master? Determinedly he faced the aviator: "*I'm all right* . . . have them setbacks real often!" He gasped as a stab of pain brought beads of perspiration to his forehead. With visible effort he stifled a groan. "I've got a map . . . of this distric'; if I give it to you . . . will you go away?"

The aviator shook his head. "I couldn't conscientiously go away and leave you here alone. The remembrance of how you look would haunt me! You're too sick to realize that—you need medical attention."

Jem Brown was driven to desperation: "If you'll go away—an' not come back for a month—I'll give you the deeds to the Guayule . . . an' on 'em I'll mark plain *where the lost lode takes up again!* I've knowed it for forty year . . . but I learnt long since that money don't buy you nothin' but confusion . . . an' I wasn't a-goin' to have folks a-spoilin' this mountain like they spoiled the rest!"

Then, as the aviator stared at him, the old man's eyes filled with tears: "There'll be *plenty* . . . so's you can buy all the things you've ever wanted. . . . But now that I've seen your machine . . . and know that never, any

more . . . will there be a place where I can get away . . . I'd like for to have this last month . . . alone on Guayule, to say good-bye. . . . Then you can take it——"

"You'll do better than *I* expect if you live another week!" The aviator's voice was troubled, perplexed: "I really *can't* leave you; it wouldn't be decent!"

Jem Brown dropped down on the pine branches and stared helplessly in front of him. For a second the narrow window framed a stretch of desert, paved in tawny gold, dotted with sage-brush; through it a camel train wound into the settlement—and his mother was gone.

Followed, then, a shimmer of heat waves above shining metal rails where great locomotives thundered upon their scheduled way. . . . Soon Jenny's place knew her no more.

With a feeble gesture of resignation Jem Brown turned toward the stranger: "I guess . . . maybe . . . this is *my* signal!" he whispered.

Progress had caught up with him.

THE END



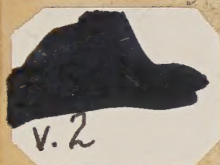


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